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# The House of Hawley



Elmore Elliott Peake







# **THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY**



# THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY

BY  
ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

AUTHOR OF "THE DARLINGTONS," "THE  
PRIDE OF TELLFAIR," ETC.

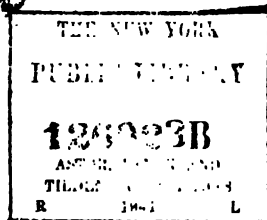


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TV

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

TO MY FATHER

THOMAS DE WITT PEAKE, D.D.

TO WHOSE SCHOLARLY ATTAINMENTS AND

THE STUDIOUS ATMOSPHERE

WITH WHICH HE INVESTED ME IN MY YOUTH

I OWE MANY OF THE

SWEETEST AND NOBLEST PLEASURES

OF MY LIFE



# THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY

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## CHAPTER I

IF you board a swift south-bound train in Chicago, a seven hours' ride will set you down in another country. You are still in Illinois, for this giant young commonwealth requires a bed on the map equal to the latitude between Marblehead, Massachusetts, and Petersburg, Virginia—nearly four hundred miles. But the change in the character of the country is evident even from a car window. The prairie is no longer in undisputed possession, but is elbowed aside by tracts of forest. The vast cornfields of the upper two-thirds of the state are largely superseded by meadows, wheat-fields, and orchards, with strawberry and melon patches nestling in chosen nooks between. The compact homesteads of the New England emigrants are replaced by the rambling, roomy houses whose models were brought from Virginia and Kentucky.

This is "Egypt." A different atmosphere salutes your nostrils when you leave the train. This is the land of the Ardent Sun, and to this mellowing solar influence are due alike the profusion of flower and fruit and the leisure and hospitality which never fail to attract a

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visitor from the North. The people are mostly from the South, and their southern habits, customs and traditions, after a transplantation of nearly one hundred years, still retain a surprising vitality. "Evening" is almost always used for "afternoon." "Mr. Will" and "Mr. Tom," "Miss May" and "Miss Nance," are the charming and useful modes of address for that intermediate stage of acquaintance between formality and intimacy. Moreover, the people love their long, scorching summers, in spite of the complainings thereat incidental to human nature anywhere and everywhere. They dislike cold, on the other hand, and regard it as a burly interloper from the North.

Barnwell, the capitol of Pembroke County, is a fair type of the Egyptian town. The sandstone court-house, antedating the war, occupies a central position, at the intersection of the two main streets. About it, forming a hollow square, are the stores, with their wooden awnings—unsightly adjuncts, to a sophisticated eye, but very comfortable places to tarry under on a scorching afternoon in the dog-days. Looking in any direction—north, east, south or west—down the pleasant vistas which arching elms and maples make of Main and Wabash streets, one glimpses the open country, a short three-quarters of a mile away. Many of the yards, particularly on the side streets, are still fenced, thickly set with trees and shrubbery, and have not yet learned the rattling song of the lawn-mower.

The Hermitage, Major Elias Hawley's manor-like estate, was situated a mile and a half from Barnwell. From the upper story of the veranda the spire of the

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Methodist Church in the village was visible above the intervening tree-tops; and with the aid of the field-glasses which he had carried through the Civil War, the Major could, on a clear day, make out the flickers which kept house in the wooden cone. On quiet Sunday mornings the notes of the bell floated with tremulous sweetness across the orchards and fields of yellowing wheat, filtered through the fluttering elms and cottonwoods about the Hermitage, and slipped into the cool, dusky recesses of the great veranda, inviting the Major to church. He seldom accepted their invitation, but he always thanked the little messengers with a grateful heart.

One summer morning Christine Hawley, the Major's granddaughter, stood on the edge of the veranda with a magazine and a piece of sewing in the hollow of her arm. Her elbow sleeves and plaited hair looked girlish, at first glance; but there was a fulness about her bare forearm and a thickness and length about the plait which betokened maturity. Halting for a moment, she swept the sun-flecked scene with her eyes and listened to the breathless burst of song from a cardinal in the grove. Then filling her lungs with the glorious air, she laid hold of her skirts with a vigorous grasp, lifted them perpendicularly from behind—exposing a pair of slippers and an inch or two of polka-dot stocking—and daintily stepped across the dewy grass to a hammock which was swung between two ancient elms.

She had scarcely settled herself when rapid hoof-beats on the public road, a quarter of a mile away, caught her ear. As she lifted her head, idly, the horseman turned into the lane, raising a cloud of dust be-

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hind him. The girl's pulse quickened; but a second glance showed the rider to be Pinckney Singleton, her Cousin Diana's husband, and Christine resumed her reclining position with a breath of relief. A wilder prank than a breakneck ride was required of Pinckney Singleton to alarm any of his relatives.

Dismounting and tying his horse, the young man paused and lit a cigarette with a deliberation which was in rather amusing contrast to his recent haste. He looked something over thirty, was picturesquely dark, and wore his equestrian costume handsomely.

"How do, Chris," said he cheerily, drawing up a rustic chair and dusting his boots with his handkerchief.

"How do, Pink," she answered, mimicking his careless salutation. "If grandpa sees Comet tied to that box-elder, he'll take your head off."

Mr. Singleton either cared little about the disposition of his head or else he discredited his fair cousin's words, for he merely took two or three deep, reflective inhalations from his cigarette. Chris watched him from underneath her long lashes with some amusement.

"Chris, I need money, and I need it bad," he began.

Chris dropped her eyes to the page before her, where she apparently found something of interest, for she did not answer or look up. Pinckney, no whit abashed, took another puff.

"I don't want it for any foolishness, either," he continued. "I want it for a strictly legitimate business enterprise—one that is bound to win out. I'll tell you what it is, if you care to hear, though of course it's strictly confidential."



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"Better not tell a woman, then," she observed, still without looking up.

"I hold an option, at a dirt-cheap price, on a mining claim near Joplin, Missouri—a lead-mine, you know. There's a small mill on it and some good ore has been taken out. I can't buy the mine myself, of course—haven't the money; but I know some people who are eying it with considerable interest, and if they take it at the figure I have named them, I'll clean up fifteen hundred dollars. Now all they need to make them buy the mine, is to see it. But if I take them over—there are three of them—I'll have to pay their expenses, of course, and show them a little time in St. Louis. It will take a little money, only a little; but things have actually come to that pass with me that I haven't the paltry sum required."

"What is the size of the paltry sum required?" she asked, lifting her cool gray eyes.

"Two hundred dollars."

She puckered her mouth for an incredulous whistle, but made no sound—deterred, perhaps, by his disapproving eye.

"I shouldn't call that a paltry sum, especially if I didn't have it. Isn't that a good deal of money just to take four people to Joplin, Missouri, and back?"

"You're a woman, Chris, and you don't understand such things," he answered with masculine superiority. "I can't take those fellows around the city in a street-car, or put them up at a cheap hotel. They'd lose all faith in me and my proposition if I did. You have to



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impress such fellows, I tell you—make them believe that money is nothing to you, and that you don't care particularly whether you sell or not."

"But they know that you do care, or you wouldn't be spending your time and money on them."

"They *know* it, certainly," he admitted, "but that's different from having them think that I'm hard up or dead anxious to sell."

"I don't see the necessity for such an elaborate deception," answered Chris, femininely. "You'll never succeed, Pinckney, until you get rid of these pernicious notions of yours. You try to make everybody believe that you are a millionaire. I am sorry, but you have bled grandfather so often that I can't conscientiously intercede for you again."

He dropped forward, with his elbows on his knees and his eyes on the ground, a picture of dejection and injured innocence. Chris watched him with a smile lurking in the corners of her strong, sweet, womanly mouth.

"Bled!" he repeated, bitterly. "What a cousinly word! And from the lips of a woman who never earned a dollar in her life! I have been grinding out a miserable existence at the law here for ten years. I wanted to leave this one-horse town long ago. I knew that a man born and raised here would never have any show—that everybody would always consider him a boy. But, no! Grandfather and you and Di and Uncle Lyman and all the rest wouldn't hear of it. You were all going to help me so much. Now when I ask for a little money from grandfather, to help me make more, I am accused

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of *bleeding* him. Who, in the name of God," he demanded tragically, lifting his handsome head and flashing eyes, "would I turn to but my own people?"

"To the stage, perhaps," said she, caustically. "You are an excellent actor."

"That's right—some more of your sarcasm, Chris. I may turn to the stage yet," he added threateningly. "One thing is sure—I am done with you all," arising and buttoning his coat. "I shall not bleed you any more."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to town to sell that horse."

"Sit down," said Chris calmly, and he obeyed with an alacrity scarcely in keeping with his threat. "Don't be a boy. Have you told Di of this deal, as you call it?"

"No. You know that Di hasn't any faith in me. I haven't the heart to tell her anything any more. She throws cold water on every project I suggest."

Christine knew, without blaming Di in the least, that there was truth in this, and her heart softened.

"I have no idea that grandfather would let you have the money, Pink, even if I should ask him for you. He, too, has lost faith in you. But *I* haven't. As often as you have failed me, Pinckney, I believe in you still, and I am going to let you have the money myself. I have a hundred and eighty-five dollars of my own in the bank, and that ought to be more than enough for you."

"I can't take your money, Chris."

"Yes, you can. That's all nonsense."

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"Di said you were going to buy a new phaeton with it."

"The phaeton can wait. All I ask is your word of honor that you want the money for just the purpose you say."

For answer, he impetuously drew a handful of letters from his pocket, and held out two of them for her to read. She shook her head.

"Your word is enough," said she.

She arose and entered the house—this time by way of the great front hall, as wide as a modern room, and with a flight of stairs which a six-file column of troops could have marched up without breaking ranks. Dropping down at a little writing-desk in her room, she unsheathed a dainty, pearl-stocked pen and wrote a check in favor of Pinckney Singleton, for the full amount of her deposit in the bank. She was not conscious of any particular virtue in the act. She expected the money back—sometime—and even if she never got it she would not suffer. Yet it meant the giving up, temporarily, of her cherished new phaeton, and it might bring her grandfather's displeasure down upon her head. The old patriarch held his tribe in a firm though loving grasp, despite his seventy-nine years. He had decreed that Pinckney Singleton should have no more money, and Christine's lending it to him was a breach of family discipline. So she gave a little sigh as she rose.

Not so with Pinckney. The clouds had left his face when she returned; he was cheerily burning a fresh cigarette, humming to himself, and leisurely glancing

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through Christine's magazine. Money in his pocket always made him happy, no matter whether it was his own or not.

"You understand that I must tell grandfather," said Chris, handing him the check.

"Certainly, though I don't see the necessity," he assented, with that easy philosophy of the man who gives no hostages to the future. "Now I am going to fix you up my note for this amount, Chris, payable in sixty days; though the chances are that I shall pay it in six." He drew a gold-stamped leather-bound note-book from one pocket and a fountain-pen from another. "I'll make the interest ten per cent, which isn't a bit too much when you consider what this accommodation means to me. If grandfather is of the opinion that I am bleeding *you*, when you tell him of this loan—and he probably will be—just flash this note on him."

Christine tucked the note in her belt with a quiet gleam of amusement in her eyes. In her grandfather's tin box there was a small bale of Pinckney's notes, which the old man had once humorously offered her to make lamp-lighters of—to save good paper, he said.

At this moment Christine's grandmother crossed the lawn. She was a tall, straight, slender woman, white-haired, but with eyes which had lost none of their kindliness or interest in life.

"Pinckney," said she, "I'm making up a little basket for Di. I intended to send it in by Billy, but Cordelia has set him to churning, and I wonder if you couldn't take it. Could you carry eggs on that skittish horse of yours without breaking them?"

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Pinckney smiled in a manner which declared his perfect horsemanship, and the trio proceeded to the house. The Hermitage kitchen was a little kingdom ruled over by a fat black Amazon named Cordelia. Its huge size was apt to puzzle a visitor until he had seen Cordelia and her dusky crew at work on a state dinner. At such a time there was not a square foot of space to spare. Mrs. Hawley's "little" basket sat on a table and contained two dozen fresh eggs, two dressed spring chickens, several bundles of tender young onions and radishes, and a dish of cottage cheese. To this there was yet to be added a roll of butter, for which Christine was despatched to the spring-house. Pinckney and a couple of dogs accompanied her.

The graveled path, after entering the garden, wound through an enchanted space of shade, color, and fragrance, to a flight of damp, mossy steps which led down to the entrance of the little log spring-house. A mat of willows shut out every ray of the sun, and as Chris flung open the door the cool, moist breath of the spring struck her gratefully in the face. Inside, it was still damper, darker and cooler. On a platform submerged in the crystal pool sat a dozen pans of milk, thickly coated with cream. At one side, on a stone slab which was all but submerged, lay rolls of butter wrapped in wet linen cloths, home-made cheese, and eggs. On a similar slab across the pool was a great earthen dish of strawberries. Altogether, it was a sight to make one's mouth water.

"Pick out the biggest roll," said Christine.

But Pinckney first took a gourd from the wall,

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dipped up a pint or so of the cold, colorless fluid, and handed it to Chris. She took a few dainty sips; then holding the gourd high in the air she poured the water slowly back, watching it break with a crackling sound into a thousand pearly bubbles.

On the way back to the kitchen they passed Billy Million, toiling at a churn in the shade of a big cottonwood. His black face was glistening with sweat, and as Mrs. Hawley lifted the churn lid to inspect the gathering butter they heard him say in an aggrieved tone:

"Mis' Hawley, I done hired out hyere to take care of the Major's drivin' hosses, and I don't want no more of this churnin' business in mine. My haid feels like it gwine to buss."

"I don't think it will burst," answered Mrs. Hawley placidly, replacing the lid. "You don't churn often, Billy. Lucy is sick to-day, and Zepherine is away, and the other girls are too little for such work. I am sure you wouldn't want a woman as large as Cordelia to do the churning, when she has so much to do besides."

"It would do Dely good to sweat some of that hog fat offen her," grumbled Billy.

His tone was unguardedly loud, and the next moment a mighty figure loomed in the kitchen doorway.

"What's that, nigger, about hog fat?" Cordelia demanded, fiercely.

Billy, whose back was toward the kitchen, instinctively ducked his head until any missile in the shape of a flat-iron or a stick of stove-wood should have had time to pass over.

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“Never mind, Delia,” interposed Mrs. Hawley. “Go back to your work. Billy said nothing worth repeating.”

Cordelia, who dearly loved a tongue fight, with a few slaps from her broad palm thrown in for good measure, turned reluctantly back, shuffling her feet and snorting bellicosely. Christine smothered a laugh and returned to the hammock, where, stretched at full length, with her hands clasped under her handsome head of hair, she watched Pinckney Singleton canter briskly down the lane, with his basket rising and falling on his arm.

## CHAPTER II

THE breeze which came tripping through the orchard, pressed its moist, scented lips to Christine's temple. The vaulted elms above whispered secrets confided to them by oriole and bee. The old cottonwood at the corner of the kitchen murmured contentedly. From the maples along the lane came the dreamy call of a wood-pewee. Somewhere in the soft distance a meadow-lark was whistling as he planned the snug grass home, close to the ground, which he and his bride expected soon, oh, so soon, to build.

The last went straight to Christine's heart. Hers was a family of home-lovers. In England, they had lived for centuries under one roof; in Virginia, for a hundred and fifty years; and here in Illinois for over half a century. She loved every brick in the great house. In all its twenty-six rooms there was hardly a nook or corner, from cellar to garret, into which she had not pressed her little body, when a child, at some time or other—preferably on wild winter nights or during summer thunder-storms. Even the angles of the cornices in which the pigeons and sparrows built, and the hole in the eaves which had been occupied for many years by a pair of wrens or their progeny, were dear to her fancy. When little, she used to yearn for wings and the magic power of making herself small, in order



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that she might fly up and cuddle for a moment in these snug places.

The reaches of wheat, the orchard, the towering trees and dusky aisles between; the cool, dim dining-room, with its somber table and glistening sideboard—all these had been as beautiful as heaven to her childhood. But her most vivid recollections were of the kitchen, just after a carriage-load of unexpected guests had arrived. She was so little then and everything else was so big that she could not now, by any feat of imagination, reconstruct that vast enclosure of her childhood, crossed and recrossed by hurrying blacks, resounding with the clatter of dishes and the banging of oven doors, echoing with Cordelia's loud commands, and filled with a score of mouth-watering odors.

The next most precious gem in Memory's treasure-house was the two-storied veranda, with its square brick pillars, around three sides of the house. Then, as now, it was always furnished in summer with rugs, tables and chairs, books, papers, and bowls of fruit, and hung with hammocks. Here, in the sultry dog-days of Southern Illinois, the family practically lived—worked and ate and not infrequently slept. Here, when the house was full of guests, they danced on moonlight nights. Here, too, had been fed, with unfailing hospitality, the brass bands and delegations which came to honor Major Hawley during the summer and fall of his campaign for the governorship of the state.

This remote period had little meaning for Christine now, but she remembered well a night when one of the

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gentlemen talked very loud and laughed uproariously at every joke, until finally the ladies retired and took her with them. She knew now that the man had drunk too much, and that her grandfather never forgave the breach of etiquette. She knew, also, that his refusal to forgive it had probably cost him the governorship, for the offender stood high in party councils. Yet the iron-willed old man had never expressed a regret; and Christine had no doubt that if it were all to be done over again, he would act just the same.

Her reverie was broken by the nicker of a horse. She recognized it as Black Prince's, and turned her head far enough to see her grandfather riding in from the fields. He weighed nearly three hundred pounds, but gave no suggestion of unwieldiness. His massive figure was clad in linen, and he wore a broad-brimmed Panama hat of a kind which had been furnished him for the last forty years by a hatter in Richmond. Major Hawley belonged to that class of men who conquer a head-piece the first week they wear it, breaking it of its bandbox stiffness and precision as a horse trainer breaks a colt. His hats, whatever their original shape, quickly conformed to a type which eloquently expressed the owner's dominating personality. The brim would dip in front with the aggressiveness of a hawk's bill, and the crown acquire a series of characteristic dents.

The Major swung down from his horse with scarcely a hint of his weight or age, and tossed the reins to Billy Million, who was only too glad of this excuse for resigning his churn-stick.

"Billy," said the old gentleman, in his leonine voice,

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plainly audible from where Christine lay, "I received a bill to-day from Mr. Colter for two steel traps, and it says on the bottom, 'Bought by Billy.' Do you know anything about it?"

"If it says that on the bill I reckon I muss, Major Hawley," answered Billy, scratching his head. "Yassir, come to think of it, I recollect now that I did buy two steel traps."

"Who told you to buy them?"

"Nobody, suh. I juss bought 'em on my own accord-like."

"For what purpose?"

"For rats, of course, suh," answered Billy, as if astonished at his employer's denseness.

"You are sure they weren't for coons?"

"Coons! Them traps? Gawd, no, suh. Never ketch me settin' no traps fur coons. Not *steel* traps. Steel traps chaw their legs off and then good-by Mr. Coon. I reckon I got more sense'n to buy steel traps fur coons."

"Then you didn't set one of them in that old hollow cottonwood down by the strawberry-patch?"

"No, suh, I never did," protested Billy, indignantly. "If anybody tole you I did, he's a liar. You mean that ole cottonwood what the lightnin' struck? I ain't been by that ole cottonwood, Major Hawley, fur two years, I reckon. I ain't got no time to be loafin' aroun' coon-trees nowadays, 'tween churnin' and doin' other female jobs aroun' hyere. I bait them traps and sot 'em in the barn this very mawnin', I think. Yassir, it was this very mawnin'."

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"Very well. I simply mentioned the matter because one of old Sherman's boys found a steel trap in that cottonwood, and asked me about it. I was quite sure it wasn't mine, so I told him he could keep it." Then, as Billy began to blink in perplexity, the Major added carelessly, as he turned away, "I was rather sorry that the trap wasn't mine, for it contained a fine fat coon."

"Major Hawley," called Billy, with a crestfallen note in his voice, "mebbe some of these yere sneakin' niggers took that trap outen the barn, and mebbe it *was* your'n. It wouldn't take me more'n a minute to tell, because I'd know them traps in Chiny. I'll juss skin over to Sherman's cabin and——"

"No. The boy found the trap last night, and if you set both of mine for rats this morning, it must have been somebody else's." He walked away with a twinkle in his eye, while Billy slowly and dejectedly led Black Prince away to his stall.

"Come here, grandpa!" called Christine, still laughing to herself over this dialogue.

As Elias crossed the lawn, he removed his hat to cool his head. The act revealed a brow like a cliff, a bald crown, and a fringe of fine white hair below. His eyes were blue and rather small, or seemed so in his large face. From between them protruded a beak-like nose. Beneath this, a firm, large mouth, sagging cheeks, and a massive jaw. He truly looked the old lion that he was, loving best to play with his cubs and to exert his vast strength only that they might eat and live, but terrible when roused to wrath or brought to bay.

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"Grandpa, I have done something that you won't like," began Christine, with a slightly quicker pulse.

"Then you had better not tell me what it is."

"If I don't, you'll be angry."

"I shall be angry if you do, it's likely. However, if you must tell, come over here on my lap first," said he, dragging nearer an immense rustic chair and kicking out of the way the one lately occupied by Pinckney Singleton, to which he dared not trust his great weight.

"Maybe you won't want me, after I tell," said she, coyly, sinking down upon his knees with a rustle of starched skirts.

"Maybe not."

"I loaned Pinckney some money this morning, grandpa dear," said she, simply.

"Well," said he, just as simply.

"I loaned him all I had—nearly two hundred dollars. He came out to borrow it of you, but I knew that you wouldn't let him have it. It's not for any foolishness this time, grampsy. He is trying to sell a lead-mine down in Missouri that he has an option on, and I think he wants to do better. He was real serious and I felt sorry for him. Sometimes I think you are just a little hard on him, grandpa."

"You did wrong, daughter," answered Elias. "Every dollar you lend that boy is a strand in the rope with which he will eventually be hung. I grieve to say it of a member of my own family, but Pinckney Singleton isn't worth the salt it would take to cure his hide. I have done for him what I could. I haven't been too hard on him; I have been too easy. I have lent him

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money. I have sent him business. To save him from disgrace, I have taken up his notes and paid his debts. I have pointed out his errors, kindly and charitably. Net result: ingratitude and disrespect. I hadn't heard of this lead-mine scheme, but ten to one it exists only in his brain."

"But he had letters, grampsy!" protested Christine.

"Of course he had letters. Did you ever know of a scamp that didn't have letters? What are you going to do now for a new phaeton?"

"Do without, till Pinckney pays me back."

The patriarch's face relaxed, and he took one of the girl's slippered feet in his big hand.

"I should grieve if these little members had to press the dust between here and town until that time comes."

"No, dear!" she exclaimed again. "You wrong him. I believe he'll pay me back. I don't believe he'd lie to me about this."

Elias gazed fondly down into her trustful young eyes with his old and experienced eyes; then a smile, beautiful and tender, lit his ancient face as a burst of sunshine lights the granite front of a mountain.

"Well, maybe he will pay—with an angel for a creditor. Maybe he will do better. Let us hope so. It may be that you can do for him what I can't. But promise me that you will never lend him another dollar without my consent."

"I promise. And I think you are a real good grandfather for not scolding me."

"Oh, ho! I fancied I had been scolding you. You

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are thicker-skinned than I thought. The next time I shall lay it on heavier. But I'm too old to get angry any more. It's a wearing, tearing thing—this getting angry. Let's you and I enter into an agreement not to get angry at anybody or anything for—well, say one month. I was going to say one year, but you could never hold out that long. What's this?" he demanded, fumbling at her belt.

She blushed, snatched Pinckney's note from his fingers, and held it behind her.

"A billet-doux, I see!" he exclaimed.

"It is not."

"No? You are blushing like a peony."

"Read it and see," said she, surrendering the bit of paper.

He held the note off from him somewhat—he had never worn glasses—and glanced it through.

"You had better turn this over to me for safe keeping," said he, ironically.

Immediately after dinner he drove to town. Before the supper-bell rang a brand-new, glistening phaeton stood in the yard, and a moment later the astonished and delighted Christine was hanging on her beloved grand-sire's neck, showering his face with kisses.

"You haven't told me yet that I'm spoiling Chris, mother," said the Major that night, with a twinkle, after he and Mrs. Hawley had retired to their room.

"If she could be spoiled, I fancy it would have happened long ago," answered the gentle old lady. "I don't really think, though, she ought to be taught that a virtuous act always brings a material reward."

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“Neither do I. Yet I’ll be hanged, Ruth, if I don’t like to give my head a back seat occasionally, and invite my heart down into the front row. God bless her generous, tender little heart!” he added, fervently. “And yours, too, my love!” taking her slim hand in his.

“You can’t buy me off that way,” she declared, with a smile. But of course he could.



## CHAPTER III

On the following Thursday afternoon Christine, seated in her new phaeton, with black Billy at her side, drove into the village to assist her Cousin Di in a little social function. In going from the Hermitage to town, you first passed down a long lane of rock maples to the public road. If a rabbit did not hop across the lane, or a squirrel bark from a neighboring hickory, or a bob-white whistle from a fence-post, the trouble was almost certainly with your eyes or ears. Two sycamores supplemented the brick pillars of the big gate at the end of the lane. From this point the highway ran leisurely along, in gentle curves, between thickets of sassafras, blackberry and scrub oak, enlivened at intervals with a clump of wild roses or a gaudy trumpet-vine which lorded it over the more lowly vegetation from the top of the stake-and-rider fence or the stub of a tree.

Upon entering Barnwell, the road became dignified with the name of Main Street. Under this new title it led you, first, past the pleasantest, shadiest homes in the village; then the court-house and the stores; then more pleasant homes, until it emerged from the town on the other side and struck off in a southwesterly direction across the prairie. If a traveler stayed with the road long enough, and fainted not from heat or

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dust, nor grew impatient with its meanderings and delays, he would eventually reach Cairo, where the beautiful Ohio is lost in the turbid waters of the Mississippi, and Kentucky lies on one side and Missouri on the other. Here, in sight of two former slave states, Chicago and the New Englanders of Northern Illinois seem remote indeed—remoter by far than New Orleans.

The street on which the Singletons lived had doubtlessly been christened by the forefathers, back in the 1820's. Its name, in fact, could still be found on time-stained plats hanging in dusty law-offices. But perhaps not a dozen people in Barnwell knew what that name was, or cared to know. It was a narrow, lane-like street, dusty in the center, weedy on the margins. The board sidewalks were in various stages of warp and decay, with a gap here and there, and rusty nails sticking up to catch unwary toes. Yet, withal, it was a sweet, charming street. Elms, silver-leaf maples and honey-locusts roofed it over. Peach, plum and cherry boughs hung over the fences, and playfully picked at the shoulders of passers-by. Roses nodded through the pickets; stately sunflowers and hollyhocks reared themselves on high. Honeysuckles perfumed the air. Cat-birds and wrens flitted through the shrubbery. Most of the houses were set well back from the street, among numerous trees, and further veiled from a too-familiar gaze by trellises, summer-houses and arbors. Cool, peaceful and secluded they looked, with broad inviting verandas, and doors that were seldom closed, even at night, from May to October.

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Such a place was the Singletons'; and on the afternoon in question its lawn, more carefully trimmed than most of the neighbors', was set with half a dozen small tables covered with white lunch-cloths. Scattered about in the shade were the ladies of the Six O'clock Club and their husbands.

Pinckney Singleton had gone into St. Louis on Tuesday. For what purpose, he had not informed his wife, but he had promised her to be back by three o'clock on Thursday, in order to be present at her luncheon. He had failed to come, but Di had decided to wait for him until the six o'clock train. It thus happened that she and Christine and the four young girls who were to do the serving were in the kitchen, giving the final touch to the refreshments, at five-thirty, some time after the hour Di had originally set for lunch.

Christine suspected that Diana, in spite of her tranquillity, was unhappy. Di had a wife's natural desire for her husband to be present on an occasion like this, and at least to simulate, if he could not feel, an interest in her little social affair. No one could have done this more gracefully than Pinckney Singleton, yet no one did it seldomer. Indeed, people were so accustomed to seeing Di alone—at home, in her phaeton, at church, and everywhere else—that Pinckney's appearance with her was apt to excite comment. Di, who was something of a philosopher, seldom allowed herself to repine over this state of affairs any more; but she still had moods, as on the present occasion, when she was spurred by a sense of shame to a final desperate

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effort to bring about some reformation in her marital establishment.

In the midst of the bustle in the kitchen, Di turned at the sound of a light, cautious footstep in the dining-room. There stood a small, mud-bespattered child—a boy, apparently, with his hat pulled roguishly down over his eyes. But Diana had no difficulty in recognizing her eight-year-old daughter Pauline. The boy's suit, in which the child occasionally persuaded her mother to let her masquerade, was one which she had first worn in some private theatricals, and which Diana supposed to be safely locked in a chest in the attic.

"Pauline, where have you been?" asked Diana with quiet severity. "You were to be home by half-past four and it's now half-past five. Mary and Lillian and Ethel are all here, waiting for you, and have been for a long time."

"I seen 'em," answered Pauline, serenely.

"You *seen* 'em!"

"Saw them," the child corrected herself, and coolly reached for a fragment of chicken sandwich.

"Where have you been in that rig? You look as if you might have been dragged through a mud-hole."

Pauline emitted a low, amused laugh, and it was hard to escape the infection of her hazel eyes.

"I've been fishin', mamma, with Willie and Frank, and I fell in the creek."

Di ran her hand maternally over the little one's damp clothing; then lifting the disreputable hat from the tousled head she impulsively kissed the pretty sun-burnt face. Pauline laughed again.

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"If you won't scold me, Mamma Di, I'll tell you something else."

"Very well."

"Cross your heart and hope you may die?"

"Yes."

"I didn't *fall* in. The boys dared me, and I jumped in."

"The little wretches!" exclaimed Di, indignantly. "You might have drowned."

"Oh, no. It was only up to my neck. But when I went in, it just took my breath—like that," illustrating with a gasp.

"Oh, my baby!" exclaimed Di, pressing the child to her breast.

"But you mustn't tell on them," continued Pauline, seriously. "If you do, they'll get whipped, and won't play with me any more. They said so, and they was awfully scared when I jumped in, and gived me all their fish for promising not to tell."

"I'm glad you told me. It's always right to tell mamma everything. Now I must wash and dress you instantly. We'll leave Auntie Chris in charge here."

"Can't I have my fish for supper?" asked Pauline.

"You wouldn't want fish, would you, when the others have only pressed chicken? Besides, it's too late to fry them. You can have them for breakfast, if they are fit."

To prove the fishes' fitness, Pauline went after her string, which she had prudently concealed under the morning-glories by the front porch until she had prepared her mother for its reception. It consisted of

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three wretched, sun-dried, glassy-eyed chubs, the size of a man's middle finger. Di gave a shriek of merriment; then put the piscatorial collection in the ice-box and whisked the fisherwoman off to her bedroom.

Two of the gentlemen out on the lawn had, without their wives' knowledge, quietly laid a bet on Pinckney's return in time for lunch. The odds were two to one against it. When the train finally whistled, the bettors leaned expectantly back in their chairs and gave each other a significant wink. Everything else was in readiness. Pauline was dressed and seated at a little table provided especially for her and her small friends. The girls who were to serve stood at the dining-room door and awaited the signal from the hostess, who, with Christine, had returned to the lawn. Ten minutes passed; then footfalls sounded on the sidewalk, and in a moment Pinckney Singleton emerged from behind the next-door neighbor's lilacs, opened the gate—which seemed to stick a little—and entered the yard.

"Just in time, Pink!" jovially called the gentleman who had won two dollars by Pinckney's timely appearance.

Singleton did not answer. He passed up the flagged walk to the house without glancing to right or left, or speaking to any one. But perhaps none of the puzzled guests, even among the men, suspected his condition until he reached three times for the knob of the screen door, and caught his toe on the threshold as he vanished within. Long before this, though, Di's heart had given one great throb, stood still an instant, and then resumed its regular beat. Christine, at the same time, had

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turned pale ; but she, too, was a Hawley, and was quickly herself again.

As if nothing had happened, Di lifted her handkerchief to the expectant girls in white at the side door, and a moment later they crossed the lawn with their trays. But the party was as dead as the chubs in the ice-box, and by eight o'clock the last guest had found some excuse for an early departure. The two lone women sat in silence for some time ; Pauline lay on her back in the grass and crooningly counted the first pale stars as they popped into sight above. Then Christine arose and crossed over to Di.

" I am so sorry, dear," said she, kissing the other's cold lips.

" Chris, do you know what Pinckney went to St. Louis for? "

" Yes. Don't you? "

" No."

" It was to try to sell a lead-mine that he held an option on."

" Do you know whether he borrowed any money from grandfather or not? He asked me for some."

" No, he didn't." She added, after a momentary hesitation: " I let him have some, though."

" How much? "

" What difference does it make, darling! " exclaimed Christine with a burst of tenderness. " If it's gone, you can't help it. And he may have made the sale, after all."

Di arose. Her head, usually so proudly poised, drooped wearily.

" I could stand it for myself, but it cuts me to the

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heart to think of having brought a black sheep into our family. I'll go through his pockets," she added, with sudden resolution. "We may find something that will make us sleep better."

Pinckney was in bed, locked in a drunken stupor. His clothes were laid out on a chair, though not as neatly as usual. Christine stood at the bedroom door while Di made her search. Aside from some letters, the outside of which she merely glanced at, the search yielded a bunch of keys, two blue poker chips, a brass check bearing the name of the Lionel Club in St. Louis and certifying that the bearer was entitled to one fifteen-cent drink at the club bar, and about seventy-five cents in change.

"He has been gambling again," said Di, in a dead tone.

Christine's tears started as she recalled Pinckney's promises at the Hermitage.

"I don't want you to cry," added Di, almost sternly, as she closed the bedroom door. "He's not worth it. I have shed all the tears for him that any man is entitled to in this world from a woman's eyes. I'll never shed another one myself, and I won't allow any other woman to do it. Now tell me how much you lent him. I shall feel better for knowing."

"One hundred and eighty-five dollars," answered Christine, with an inward shiver.

"Oh, Chris!" cried Di, with a little wail. "Why did you do it! I supposed it might be forty or fifty dollars. The man who would rob a woman, and she his own cousin, is worse than a thief."



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"He may not have intended to do it," said Chris, gently.

They went out to the veranda. Pinckney's misdoings were an old story—so old that both the women preferred to avoid the topic now; and it was therefore a relief to them when a man whose footsteps they at once recognized came up the walk. It was Norman Colfax, one of Barnwell's young legal lights.

"Did you get my note, Di?" he asked, as he shook hands with the two ladies.

"Yes," she answered, in a tone which betrayed nothing of her suffering. "I was deeply wounded to think that you would cut my luncheon to attend a county convention—especially when it wasn't your own county's."

Colfax laughed. "Politics before pleasure. My own county is so hopelessly Democratic that a good Republican has to go outside now and then to get a little encouragement and assure himself that the nation is still safe."

"I suppose you made a speech."

"Oh, yes."

"And called us Democrats all the bad names you could think of. Don't you feel a little ashamed of yourself now, when I tell you that I saved you some ice-cream and cake?"

After the refreshments had been served, Di excused herself on the plea of putting Pauline to bed.

"Poor Di!" said Christine in a low voice. "Something awful happened to-day, Norman. Pinckney came home intoxicated, with all of us on the lawn. We were

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waiting for him, and of course he was the target of every eye."

"He ought to be hung," observed Colfax. "Will you explain the providence which gives a queen like Diana Singleton a husband like Pinckney? I wonder if he sold his lead-mine."

"Did you know about that, too?" asked Christine, in surprise.

Colfax smiled. "Everybody in town knows about it, Chris."

Christine wondered, with a flush, if everybody in town knew also of her part in the transaction.

"He told me it was a great secret," said she.

"Me, also—and probably everybody else."

"Did you think there was anything in it?" she asked hesitatingly, wondering if it might not yet turn out that Pinckney had made the sale and that his intoxication was merely a celebration of the event.

"Strange to say, I did. But I told him that if he would content himself with a profit of four or five hundred dollars instead of fifteen hundred, he'd have a much surer proposition. You can imagine that my advice was not received with enthusiasm."

Christine burned to ask Colfax if Pinckney had approached him for money, but she feared that such a question would smack of impertinence as well as betray her own connection with the incident.

"Grandfather will be so incensed when he hears of Pinckney's conduct," she observed regretfully.

"Your grandfather and I, by the way, had a little tilt over politics to-day," remarked Colfax.

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"How much of a tilt?" she asked, at once.

"Well, you know he never does anything by halves."

"Did he get angry?"

"I'm afraid he did."

She was silent for a moment. "Norman, why do you argue politics with grandfather?" she then asked, earnestly. "You know how quick-tempered and radical he is, and that these passages only prejudice him against you. I wish you would promise me never to argue with him again."

"Chris, I never sought an argument with him in my life," answered Colfax, soberly. "It's foolish to argue with any one and him especially. I know that what you say is true about its prejudicing him against me, and I can't tell you how many times I have refused to take up the gantlet when he has thrown it down before me. But his strictures are sometimes so vitriolic, not to say personal, that nothing short of cowardice would excuse one from answering them."

"I don't doubt it. But try to bear with him as much as you can—for my sake," she added, half involuntarily, and with a little flutter in her voice. "He's the dearest old man in the world, after all, and I want him to like you, and you to like him. I—sometimes it is rather embarrassing for me," she concluded, hurriedly.

"I yield to nobody in admiration of your grandfather's character," answered Colfax, earnestly. "He is a man whom even his enemies can not but respect. And I certainly need not tell you, Chris, that I have

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the strongest motives for courting his good opinion. If our friendship—yours and mine—has meant to you what it has to me, you will readily understand that.”

“I do,” she answered, in a low tone, without lifting her eyes, for there was a note in his voice before which she quailed.

“I have even hoped,” he continued, in the same strain, “that, with this single barrier of your grandfather’s dislike for me removed, our friendship might mean still more to us than it has in the past. Have you ever thought of that?”

“I—I don’t just understand you,” she murmured.

“I mean, Chris,” said he, throwing his mask aside, and leaning forward and taking the tips of her fingers in his hand, “that I love you.” His voice trembled slightly. “I have intended to speak before—often. But under the circumstances my heart failed me. I know your peculiar situation with reference to your grandfather. And yet—have I done wrong?”

She was silent for some time. “Norman, it would be mere coquetry for me to deny that I have looked forward to some such moment as this as a possibility. I have expected it, and—pardon me—dreaded it. And yet, if it had not come,” she added quickly, as he drew back perceptibly, “I should have been disappointed. That much is due you. I dreaded this moment and hoped that our relations might go on unchanged because I feared that any change would be for the worse. I knew, of course, that a change was inevitable; but let us not bring it about now,” she added entreatingly. “And don’t ask me any questions now; and

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maybe in the future—possibly the near future—a true answer will be easier.”

“Very well. I suppose we can play that no change has occurred.”

“Yes—if we play it between ourselves as well as before others,” she warned him.

“That will be easy,” said he, with a gentle irony which brought a flush of pleasure to her cheek.

Billy Million came in the phaeton for Christine at ten o’clock. The pair on the veranda sat and talked for some time after he had driven up to the gate and made his presence known by bawling out a lusty “Whoa!” to old Joe. A series of distressing coughs followed; but even this eliciting no response, he finally ventured to call out:

“Miss Chris, if we don’ git started soon, the moon gwine to fail us sure.”

“The moon is three hours high yet,” observed Colfax, with a low laugh, “but I fancy you had better go.” While he retained her hand, after his good-night, he added: “I am going to play that little game of yours the very best I know how, but just remember that it is a new one to me.”

“I didn’t call it a game,” she protested prettily; “and if you talk that way about it you’ll—you’ll make it all the harder. Besides, you know as much about it as I do. Maybe more.”

“Billy,” said Christine, assuming a most severe tone as they started off, “I don’t want you ever again to suggest, when you call for me anywhere, that it is

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time to go. And if your cough is ever again as bad as it seemed to be to-night for a few moments, I shall certainly suggest to grandfather that it is not safe for you to venture out after sunset. Moreover, when you are sent for me, I don't want you ever again to stop down town and get a drink. I smell liquor on your breath."

"Deed and double, Miss Chris——"

"Never mind perjuring yourself," interrupted Chris. "Just remember what I say."

"I wasn't gwine to purge myself. I was juss gwine to say that all I had was one beer—and a mighty small beer at that," he grumbled. "You don' git nothin' but foam at Miller's any more. If he don' quit robbin' me on foam, I'll take my trade somewhere else."

"I should advise you to take it to the town pump," said Christine, smiling to herself in the dark.

## CHAPTER IV

PINCKNEY came to breakfast on time the next morning, with no aftermath of dissipation on his handsome features. Di gave him a civil good-morning, and he responded in kind. Pauline, after gulping down a glass of milk, ran out to play. The parents continued their meal in silence, but not sullenly; that was not their way. Finally Di arose, as if to leave the room; but turning suddenly aside she laid a hand upon her husband's shoulder.

"Pinckney, I know all about it!" said she, in a voice that trembled. "How *could* you do it?"

For answer Pinckney dropped his dark curly head upon the table and wept like a child. When he had recovered somewhat, he began the story of the lead-mine.

"They were to go in on the same train I took," he concluded. "They weren't on the train, but I went on into the city, hoping to find them there. I did find them, but only to learn that they had bought another mine the day before—a cheaper one than mine. Di, I had done my level best to accomplish something and keep my promises to Christine, and I never felt as lonely and gloomy in my life as I did that night. While I stood in the lobby of the Planters, Charlie Lefevre came up, and we had a few drinks together. Then he invited me up to the Lionel Club. I knew what that meant and I refused. I refused several times, but

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after another drink or two I went up. We got into a game, of course, and before morning poor Chris's money was gone." His tears again began to flow.

"The first thing to be done, Pinckney," said Di, after a little, "is to pay the money back. We can undo the past that far. It will also mitigate grandfather's wrath if he knows that you have done honestly by Christine."

"I'll do honestly by her if I have to live on bread and water for five years to come," he exclaimed, as he wiped his eyes. He rolled and lit a cigarette. "Di, you are the noblest woman on the face of the earth. You have the charity of an angel, and you are tied to a man who isn't fit to kiss the ground you walk on. It breaks my heart to pain you so. I wish, for your own sake, that you didn't care so much. I wish you would be angry instead of sorry when I make a brute of myself. But, Di, darling," he added, with flashing eyes, and lifting his right hand, "I swear by all I hold holy that this is the last time! I despise myself. Oh, that disgrace yesterday!" A twinge of pain passed over his face. "Poor little girl!" He drew her closer and kissed her temple, after which he sat in a moody silence for some time, slowly smoking.

"Good-bye, dear," said he, finally, as he arose. "I shall begin to look to-day for some money to pay Christine off with. My note isn't due for sixty days, but the sooner I pay it the better, under the circumstances. God knows where I'll find the money," he added dejectedly, with one of those instantaneous changes of mood characteristic of him.



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"Perhaps you can sell the mine to some one else."

She did not suggest that he could sell his saddle-horse. Such a drastic suggestion as that would have at once dashed his virtuous resolve, as she well knew, in spite of its new-born strength. When a week had passed and he was still "looking" for the money, Di knew that he would never find it. His good intentions were plastic only at white heat, and they were now rapidly cooling. So she set out to pay the note herself. She had long since learned the folly of throwing her own small independent income into the sink-hole of Pinckney's indebtedness; but this last obligation of his was of too shameless a nature to be allowed to stand undischarged.

It was necessary for her to borrow the money, and she decided to consult her Uncle Lyman, Elias Hawley's eldest son. In every tree, no matter how sturdy, one may discover some branch which is playing a losing game with nature. It seems to have no place in the tree's economy, and more favorably situated branches cut off its sunshine from above and its sap from below. Such a branch was Di's Uncle Lyman on the Hawley genealogical tree. He dealt in real estate, bought and sold cattle, wrote insurance, speculated in apples, and did a little of everything. Yet he was always "hard up," and when he got a dollar ahead he generally spent it foolishly. His home was a key to his character. It was furnished for the most part in the plainest manner, but here and there were a few splendid articles—a baby-grand piano with a rosewood case, mahogany bookcase, and a sideboard which cost two hundred dollars—at

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once monuments to Lyman's folly and records of Dame Fortune's rare smiles. Yet they were also monuments to a generous heart, and he was a man who was universally loved.

About the hour that Diana set out in her phaeton to find Lyman, he was sitting under the wooden awning in front of Carey's store, next door to his office. He was quite as large as his father, and filled his chair to overflowing. His hands were peacefully clasped over his mountainous paunch; his feet, in low shoes and white socks, were crossed; his huge bosom rose and fell with a slow regular motion like the ebb and flow of the ocean. But though he had sat thus, immovable, for fifteen minutes, he was not asleep, but had his small gray eyes fixed upon two cock-sparrows who were fiercely contesting the ownership of a chicken-feather, while two females—presumably their wives—complacently preened their breasts and awaited the award of the valuable piece of furniture.

"If that fellow at the butt end of the feather wins, I'll smoke," murmured Lyman to himself.

The bird at the butt end finally did win, but Mr. Hawley made no move to get his cigar until a bare-footed boy came pattering along.

"Bub, just step into Carey's store and tell him that Mr. Hawley wants a cigar. He knows my brand and will charge it. Have him nip the end off in his machine, and don't forget to bring a handful of matches. I'm just out."

When the urchin returned with the cigar, Lyman continued: "Thank you, my son. Just strike one of

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those matches on that post there—I'm quite comfortably settled here and I hate to disturb myself." He lit the weed, took two or three puffs, and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. "Now run your fingers into my vest-pocket here—I can't reach it right handy for the chair arm—and you'll find some pennies. Don't take but one. Got it? Now go and buy you a jaw-breaker. It will last you half an hour if you don't suck on it too hard."

As the boy scampered off, Mrs. Singleton drove up to the curb.

"Uncle Lyman, come and take a ride with me," said she. "I want to talk to you."

"I certainly will, Dido," said he, promptly, "though I was kind of waitin' around here to see a man who has some cattle to sell. Like as not he's gone home, though."

He struggled to his feet—he was not as active as his father, queerly enough—walked ponderously over to the phaeton, gripped dashboard and topbow with his fat hands, and then, as the vehicle reeled under his weight, drew himself heavily in, leaving Diana something less than a third of the seat.

As she related Pinckney's disgraceful story, Lyman listened astutely; and when she unfolded her mission with him, his puffs at his cigar grew shorter and more energetic.

"Dido, it would do me more good than a meal of victuals to horsewhip that husband of yours!" he exclaimed at the end, turning red in the face; and, unwieldy as he looked, there was that in his eyes which

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gave the threat effect. "The little sneak! If his manhood was woven into cloth, it wouldn't make a jacket for a bumblebee. Tut, tut! Went and got drunk on Chris's money and played it away on cards! You been crying about it?"

"A little," she admitted.

"Dido, I told Millie, when Pinckney got into that last card scrape that you helped him out of, that if ever there was an angel on earth, plum feathered for heaven, it was you. Now I'm surer of it than ever. If you hadn't stuck to him he would be in the penitentiary or a madhouse by now."

Di touched her handkerchief to her eyes. "Not that bad, I hope. But if so, it's my reward to have kept him from such a fate."

"I am glad you can feel that it's a reward," said he more gently. "Maybe it's more of a reward than it looks like to me. But, child," he added regretfully, "I couldn't raise you two hundred dollars to-day, without applyin' to father, any more than I could get you a settin' of roc's eggs."

"I only wanted your advice, Uncle Lyman."

"I wish I could give you both, but I seem to run more to advice than money. If it was anybody except Chris that you wanted to pay, you could go to father and that would end the matter. Go to Norman Colfax, Di. You can trust him, and he'll be more than glad to accommodate you. He'll probably guess what you want it for—he's a shrewd devil—but that don't make any difference. He knows Pinckney as well as you do. Or you might go to Uncle Nathan Vale. He's got

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money, and he'll let you have all you want in a minute."

Diana did not want to apply to any of her relatives, and yet she had a reason, also, for not going to Colfax—a reason which she could not explain even to her Uncle Lyman. Years before, when Pinckney Singleton had forfeited Diana's love by an act which no wife can forgive, it had seemed to her that she must get away from his presence forever or go mad. But for the sake of her coming child, she throttled her repugnance to him, after a battle whose fierceness only those know who have fought it; she put aside thoughts of divorce, and resigned herself to a loveless union.

For years she had played her difficult part without faltering, and had even learned how to sympathize where she could not love. Moreover, the child whose coming she had dreaded as a slave dreads an additional fetter, had been a wonderful solace to her. Altogether, she was happier than she once could have hoped to be. But there was one contingency upon which she had not counted. That was the appearance of a man qualified to fill the niche in her heart left empty by her husband's abdication. Norman Colfax had proved to be such a man; and struggle as she would in her modesty against this conclusion, she knew that it would be easy for her to love him. This secret, locked in her immaculate breast, she expected to take with her to the grave. Nevertheless, it constantly exercised a restraining influence upon her intercourse with Colfax, and made her shrink from asking favors of him.

This one seemed imperative, however, after due de-

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liberation; and an hour later she mounted the dingy stairs to Colfax's office, leaving a delicate trail of perfume behind her. As she rounded the turn at the top she saw, through the open door of the office, a group of men sitting in a fog of tobacco-smoke, and heard a burst of laughter. She paused uncertainly, but Colfax had detected her step and came out to meet her.

"You have stumbled upon a Republican love-feast, Di," said he with a smile. "A little more and you would have been right into the den of lions."

"Any big guns?" she whispered, peeping over his shoulder.

"Indeed, yes. The Honorable Boykin Lamotte, candidate for the United States Senate; Kingdon, speaker of the House at Springfield; the warden of the penitentiary at Chester, and three or four more. All guns of pretty fair caliber. Did you want to see me? Come in here," pushing open a side door. "Their train leaves in thirty minutes, and they are breaking up now."

"But you will want to escort them to the station," she demurred.

"No, there's a committee for that purpose—fortunately for me. Some of the boys are getting pretty dry, you know." And he gently forced her through the door, into his private office.

The pressure of his fingers lingered on her arm after he had left, and tingled strangely as she glanced about her. The room was in fine disorder. Books were heaped on chairs, tables, and the floor. A soft black hat on the roller-top desk was gray with the dust of many weeks,

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and had evidently been discarded in the spring for something more seasonable. In one corner sat a pair of shoes, coated with mold. The end of a necktie hung out of a drawer. A sandwich as brown and hard as granite—the remains, probably, of a midnight lunch—lay on the table amid a litter of pens and papers.

When Colfax reentered, almost any one would have recognized the kinship between him and the room. His shoes were dusty; his black cravat was half untied, his hair tumbled, and his watch without fob or chain. Yet it was not Colfax's clothes which one looked at first, but his shrewd, kindly, oval face, laughing black eyes, and a sensitive mouth which habitually wore a smile. Hence the impression he left upon strangers was always favorable, especially after they had heard his voice—the clear, resonant voice of a natural orator, instantly commanding attention.

“Norman, I wish you were a Democrat,” said Diana.

“I should really like to be a Democrat,” he answered, drawing a penknife from his pocket and sharpening a pencil. “Most of the people that I like best in this neighborhood are Democrats. That includes the county officials, who can now and then drop a plum into a poor lawyer's basket if he happens to be of their political faith,” he added with a twinkle.

“Why aren't you one, then?”

“My conscience prevents.”

“It must be very tender.”

“It is. Then there is another particular reason why I should like to be a Democrat.” His arch look made the allusion plain to Diana. The Hawleys were

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the high priests of Pembroke County Democracy, and Christine was as warm a partizan as any of the family.

"That reason alone should convert you," said she, smiling. "But seriously, Norman, your politics must be a handicap here. You haven't any more voice in county affairs than an Alaskan Indian. The county always goes Democratic, and the choice of candidates is made in a convention from which you are debarred."

"True enough. But do you fancy that Major Hawley, for instance, would turn Republican for any such reason?"

"No. Yet I can't see what national party lines have to do with county affairs."

"You forget the machine, Di, the holy ark of the covenant. The Democratic mule is a beast that you can't nibble at. If you are to taste him at all, you must bolt him from head to tail."

"Isn't the Republican elephant the same kind of a beast?"

"Precisely."

"I think I could swallow a mule easier than I could an elephant," she retorted.

"That depends entirely upon what the animal is greased with. You Democrats have coated your mule with a gritty mixture that would rasp my throat, I fear. But seriously, Diana, I believe the only thing in the world which Major Hawley has against me is my politics." He paused a moment, looking her squarely in the eye. "His prejudice against me is some day, I fear, going to make somebody unhappy—possibly



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two somebodies. I am one of them. You will have to guess who the other one is."

It was the first time he had ever alluded in her presence to his feelings for Christine. It caught her off her guard, and she suddenly turned pale.

"Are you ill, Di?" he asked, abruptly.

"No, I was only rather suddenly reminded of some things that have come into my own life." Doubtless the answer was true enough, but a moment later her cheeks were scarlet with shame. "I should not have referred to that," she said, to hide her confusion.

"I am sorry to have suggested it."

She fumbled at her belt for her handkerchief and wiped away a tear.

"Norman, I don't want to ever think of you as a man who would give up the woman he loved simply for lack of her grandfather's consent."

"I don't mean that you shall. But naturally Major Hawley's feelings toward me affect Chris. She can't look upon me as she would under other circumstances."

"Perhaps not. But don't attach too much importance to that."

His heart leaped, but he realized that she had said all she could.

"I don't mean to accuse Chris of weakness, either. But the relations between her and her grandfather are peculiarly close, and Chris has rigid notions of family loyalty. All of you Hawleys have, for that matter. You yourself have sacrificed a good deal for your family," he added, sympathetically.

"I have never given up a man who loved me."

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"You have consented to live with a man whom you don't love," said he, with the intimacy of a bosom friend. "Isn't that as hard?"

"It may be. I don't know. It is hard enough," she answered with a quiver. "But we musn't talk about that any more. I came to ask a favor, Norman. I want to borrow some money—a hundred and eighty-five dollars."

Colfax brought the tips of his slender fingers together. "You may have it, Di, or five times that amount. But do you think you ought to borrow it?"

"Do you know what I want it for?"

"I could make a guess."

"I must borrow it," said she, firmly. "I can't let Chris lose that money."

"But next week or next month you will have some other obligation of Pinckney's to pay; and the oftener you pay them, the oftener he will contract them."

"I know I told you that I wouldn't pay any more debts of his. I am keeping my promise, too. He owes fifteen hundred dollars now that I know of which I never expect to pay. I *can't* pay it. But to let him rob my own cousin, and she a girl, would be unbearable." As he drew a check-book from a drawer, she added, "I want you to draw up a note, too, because I don't know just when I can pay this back. Maybe not for six months."

When check and note had been duly drawn and signed, he looked at her with a peculiar smile.

"Di, do you remember when you and I were out riding once, years ago, and came across some negroes

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seining in Hatcher's creek? They had thrown some worthless stone-rollers out on the bank and left them there to die. Before I knew just what you were up to, you were out of the buggy and down on the bank, restoring the poor gasping creatures to their native element. You returned with an expression on your face that I have never forgotten, and never shall forget. From that day I expected noble things of you, and I have never yet been disappointed."

She flushed with pleasure. "Never?" she asked, with shining eyes.

"Never!" he answered in a tone which thrilled her through and through.

That night, after they were both ready for bed, Diana and Pauline had one of their cat-and-kitten romps. The child was extremely strong and active for her age, and it was all that the gentle mother could do to hold her own. As they rolled and tumbled on the bed, and Diana nuzzled in her opponent's ribs and occasionally took hold with her teeth, the child shrieked with ecstasy. When play was over, the white-clad pair, flushed and tingling, rose and readjusted the covers; then Pauline knelt to say her prayers. She galloped through "Now I lay me down to sleep," added her usual "Bless papa and mamma and grandpa and grandma and Auntie Chris and all the world Amen," without break or breath, and then made a flying leap into bed, where she burst into a peal of laughter.

Diana gently chid her for such levity on the heels of her prayer; then she counted, for the second time,

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the money which she had withdrawn from the bank on Colfax's check. For safe keeping she slipped the roll into one of her stockings, and tossed the garment under the edge of the bed. Pinckney had not appeared at supper time, but would probably come in some time during the night. The first thing after breakfast, she intended to send him out to Christine with the money.

"Mamma, what does 'toxicated' mean?" asked Pauline, as Diana braided her hair before the glass.

"Intoxicated means to get drunk."

"Like old Bill Brant?"

"Yes."

"Does papa ever get 'toxicated'?"

Diana paused. She had no sentimentality—she feared at times, indeed, that she had lost all sentiment—but the question produced a tightness around her heart.

"Does he, mamma?" repeated the little one.

"Yes, my child," answered the mother, almost inaudibly. "Who has been talking to you about it?"

"Lucile Allen said that her mother said so, and I told her that her mother was an old story-teller, and bleached her hair, and that was the reason it was darker around the roots. That's why I didn't go over and play with her this afternoon. I'd sooner play with boys, anyway."

Di seldom cried—of late years, at least—but the stinging sensation in her nostrils and the twitching of her lips now heralded tears. They flowed freely for a few moments, while Pauline, all unconscious, chat-

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tered on. Then dashing the drops away, Diana knelt by the bed and drew her child's face close to her own.

"My dear, you must never be disrespectful to anybody, especially your elders. What you said about Mrs. Allen was disrespectful and untrue as well, because she isn't a story-teller although she may bleach her hair. I am sorry, though, that she said anything before Lucile about your papa. Little girls are better off not to know such things. Besides, your papa does not do as Bill Brant does when he's intoxicated, and he does not get that way often. He never spoke a cross word to me in his life when he was that way; he is a gentleman, good and kind to both of us, and you must never, under any circumstances, speak of the matter again to any one. It will hurt me very much if you do. I would prefer that you never again speak even to me about it."

"But why does papa do it, if it isn't nice?" pursued Pauline.

"Because, when men acquire a liking for whisky, they often drink it even when they know they shouldn't, just as you ate that piece of musk-melon in the ice-box yesterday when I told you not to."

"Was I 'toxicated then?" asked Pauline, brightening with interest.

"No, but you were disobedient; and you can form the habit of disobedience the same as a man forms the habit of drinking."

"Would I get so I couldn't help eating musk-melon?"

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"Well, yes, you might," answered Di, at a venture.

"I'd like to try it," said Pauline, with snapping eyes. "I'll bet I could stop. I'd grit my teeth and shut my eyes—just like that!" She laughed, but her mother did not respond.

"Mamma Di, when you first knelt down there," said the child, taking a new tack, "I thought you were going to ask God not to let papa get 'toxicated any more. Why don't you?"

"I have, my dear—many times."

"But papa still does it."

"Yes."

"What good does it do to pray, then?" asked the child. She had no precocious doubts of the efficacy of prayer; it was simply that her restless mind craved the why and the wherefore of everything.

"Well," answered Di, threading the difficult path with caution, "sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers because it is best that they should not be answered. Then, again, he answers them in a way different from what we expect; and we don't always know just when they are answered."

Pauline lay perfectly still for perhaps a minute, looking at the ceiling with bright, unblinking eyes. What subtle stirrings were taking place in that mysterious, unknowable essence behind those eyes called the Soul? What thoughts, imperishable perhaps, were being born in her young intelligence? The mother wondered, but she was never to know; for before the child spoke again a peculiar change passed over her eyes,

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as happens when one emerges from a reverie; and Di realized, with something of a pang in her mother's heart, that the little one had drawn a curtain across that Holy of Holies into which it was lawful for the great High Priest alone to enter; and from whose sacred precincts even she, the child's own mother, must be forever excluded.

"Is that why I didn't get my pony that I prayed a whole week for?" asked Pauline, meditatively.

"I suppose so."

"But if a gypsy should come along now and give me a pony, and I knew that God didn't want me to have one, would it be wrong for me to keep it?"

"No. If a gypsy or any one else should give you a pony you would then know that God wanted you to have it."

Pauline sighed. "I wish some one would do it, then. I'd sooner have a pony than anything else in the world."

"That's saying a good deal. But perhaps you will have one some day."

The child was silent again for a moment, getting drowsy. "If you get a thing, mamma, God wants you to have it; and if you don't get it, he don't want you to have it. Is that it?"

"You might put it that way," answered Di, not quite sure of her theology.

"Even if you steal it?"

"Oh, no. It's always wrong to steal."

Pauline gave the problem up, and buried her cheek in the pillow, ready for sleep. "I am going to try to

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dream that I have a pony, and then maybe I'll wake up and find it true."

Diana was about to snap off the electric when she heard the front door close. With her finger still on the button, she listened. She could usually determine Pinckney's condition by his footfalls. His steps came straight to her door, although his room was in another part of the house.

"Come," said she, in response to his rap.

He stepped into the room with his hat on. His face was flushed and his eyes bright; but Diana's practised gaze at once determined that liquor was not the cause of his excitement.

"Di, I have broken my promise about gambling," he began impetuously. "But it was in a good cause, and because I felt in my bones that this was my day to win, and I knew just what I should do with the money. I have been playing since two o'clock, and I have won two hundred and fifty dollars. I won the very first jack-pot in the game, and I said to myself, 'This is for Chris.' After that, I simply couldn't lose. Tomorrow morning I'll pay her what I owe her."

Di did not speak at once but gazed at him thoughtfully out of her warm, liquid eyes. Pinckney, however, was in no such contemplative mood; and stepping forward he encircled her yielding, uncorseted waist with his arms, and drew her to him.

"Don't you think I deserve a kiss?" he asked blithely.

"You did wrong to play," said she, slowly. "But you have a generous heart."



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So she let him kiss her. She believed that he had forfeited that right, years before; but she submitted to his kiss now, as on other rare occasions when he claimed the privilege, for the same reason that she submitted to bearing his name.

## CHAPTER V

ONE afternoon, after Chris had returned from a buggy-ride with Norman Colfax, Major Hawley called her to his side. His manner was unusually tender, but for some reason—perhaps because of this tenderness—her heart thumped fearfully. It was just prior to the annual family reunion at the Hermitage,—a season when the old man was always especially gentle,—and at first he talked only of the coming guests. These had already begun to arrive, three days in advance of the Major's birthday; and others of them would be tarrying a week after that event. Ancient beds had been dusted and brought down from the attic; cots were on hand to be set up at night in sitting-room, parlor, and halls, and even on the veranda, until the place would resemble a field hospital. The old range which was kept in the woodhouse had been blacked and set up in the kitchen, alongside the new one. Cordelia's crew had been doubled, and would be trebled.

Talk of this kind led the old man to reminiscences about himself, his past, and his future—or rather the future of his estate, into which he had put so much of his life. Sixteen hundred sun-kissed acres—woodland, orchard, meadow, pasture and field—lay about the Hermitage. They were a scene of industry from the

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ploughing for oats in March until the gathering of the apples in October by a rollicking crew of men, boys and girls. In July mountainous loads of timothy or clover hay creaked down the lanes, giving wisps of toll to the grasping fingers of the Osage-orange hedge. In September the threshers came, to live for a week on the fat of the land. Between the heavy crops were gathered the strawberries, melons and tomatoes for the Chicago market.

Yet in spite of his many acres and their varied productivity, Major Hawley was scarcely richer at seventy-nine than he had been at forty-nine. He was considered the wealthiest man in the county; yet each spring there was a needed building or bridge or half mile of fencing which had to go over another year. With a stableful of horses and mules, he was always a span or two short; and the carriage-house, though taxed to its uttermost, was always proving inadequate when the Hermitage was filled with guests.

The truth was, Elias Hawley took no thought of riches. On New Year's Eve, when he lit his pipe and figured for an hour or two on the back of an old geography in his lap, with Mrs. Hawley knitting near by, he was content to strike about the same balance as on the year before. The trouble at the Hermitage—if one chose to call it “trouble,” which Elias emphatically did not—was not with the income but with the outgo. The Hawley family was an army, and Elias was its commander-in-chief. They were good soldiers, for the most part; but as in every army, there were stragglers, deserters, sick and wounded. That is to say, there were

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granddaughters to be sent off to school, with fathers too poor to send them. There were grandsons to be set up in business; and there were Pinckney Singletons who had to be kept in business after they were set up.

How much money Major Hawley had given away in his lifetime, or lent with no expectation of return, not he himself could have told within ten thousand dollars, although every penny of it was scrupulously recorded somewhere. Again, the amount of fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, butter and poultry which, aside from charity, annually left the Hermitage with the old man's compliments, would have amazed most people, and perhaps the Major himself had he kept any account of it. Lastly, there was the great charge—never booked, of course—for the hospitality dispensed at the Hermitage. The house of twenty-six rooms was frequently full of guests for days and even weeks at a time. Thanksgiving and Christmas were always stretched into a seven-days' carnival of good cheer; and it was difficult for even passing strangers—agents for agricultural machinery, stock-buyers and apple-buyers—to do business with Elias Hawley without eating at least one meal under his roof.

The old man was silent for a while, quietly pulling at his pipe. Love of nature was a passion with both him and Christine, and they sat listening, subconsciously, to the midsummer night's din of katydid and cricket and all their scraping, rasping, buzzing and chirping assistants in the nocturnal orchestra. The whip-poor-wills down by the creek were voiceless now;

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but occasionally the guttural note of a cuckoo broke weirdly on the air, or a mocking-bird gave tongue to a few suppressed bars.

"Some day, Chris," Elias resumed, "when my old bones and your grandmother's are laid decently away, you will be mistress of the Hermitage. Some good man, whom you will meet in due time, will be its master. Knowing this, I shall rest easier in the grave. Birth, marriage and death—those are the three great epochs in one's life. Over the first and the last we have no control. If God gave it to me to ask only one more favor of Him, it would be that he should direct you aright in the choice of the partner of your life.

"I don't often speak of your mother any more, my dear; but I think of her every day of my life. She was an angel, if ever one was lent by heaven to earth. I loved her as I loved my own flesh and blood. I have in heaven a father and a mother, brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren. Yet when I think of that celestial city, it is *her* face, somehow, that stands out the clearest of them all. She seems to be smiling down at me, just as she used to smile at me here. When the time came for her to take a mate unto herself, she married my son, my favorite son, if it be lawful for a father to speak of a favorite."

A slight shudder ran over Christine. It was not alone because she detected the trend of his remarks toward herself. The name of her father, Bird Hawley, was a proscribed one in that house; and its mere mention had been known to throw her grandfather into a paroxysm of fury. Never in Christine's recollection

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had he referred to it before. Her mother she remembered vaguely—a sweet oval face, with tender blue eyes and beseeching lips, crowned with glossy, waving hair. But her father was only a name, never heard at home and seldom abroad—a shadow for which she naturally felt neither love nor bitterness, though she had had moments of girlish, romantic tenderness for the wanderer who was the author of her being.

“Your mother, when she married, was the envy of many a maiden, I have no doubt,” continued the Major. “Yet Bird Hawley, my son, broke her heart. He dishonored me, threw to the winds the traditions of a proud and honorable family, and dragged in the mire a name that men whose shoes he was unworthy to latch would have died to keep clean—yea, *have* died to keep clean. She suffered—O my God, how she suffered!” His voice trembled, and for a moment he was unable to proceed. “Yet she rose superior to suffering. The ache at her heart silenced her laughter forever—the sweetest, the bonniest laughter in the world to me. But her lovely spirit could not be crushed, whatever befell her body, and to the last she was a benediction to those about her.”

Christine, laying her head upon his shoulder, softly cried. The old man stroked her hair.

“Try, my little girl, to be as good as your mother; and you shall be happy even though you die, as she died, of a broken heart.”

“I do try, grandfather!” she answered, through her tears.

Poor Colfax! In that moment Elias Hawley had

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made the mere thought of the young man almost a profanity in the girl's mind.

"Now let us talk of these things no more to-night," said Elias. "Shall we walk over and see Susie? Your grandmother tells me she was not so well this evening."

It was a dark cloudy night, and a lantern was necessary. With their shadows grotesquely leaping along beside them, they made their way down a lane, between blackberry briars, until a short quarter of a mile brought them to a cabin standing behind a ramshackle picket fence. Here lived "Old Sherman," an ancient black, one year younger than Major Hawley himself. He popularly passed for a centenarian; but the date of his birth, along with that of scores of other slaves, was recorded in a book which had been kept by Elias's father, and was now in Elias's possession.

When Major Hawley, over half a century before, had come into his father's magnificent estate in tide-water Virginia, he performed the most heroic act of a heroic life. He freed his slaves, sold his plantation, and moved to the free soil of Illinois. He took with him just two blacks—a trusty young Guinea negro named Jubilee, and Jubilee's wife. When the party reached the limits of slavery's jurisdiction and stepped on to the ferryboat opposite Shawneetown, Elias handed these two their freedom papers. Jubilee instantly tore his into bits and scattered them on the bosom of the Ohio. Martha followed suit.

When the war broke out and Elias promptly, though sadly, put on the blue, Jubilee went with his master, as he still called him, in the capacity of a body-

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servant. When they both came back, four years later, the negro was no longer Jubilee Hawley, or Hawley's Jubilee, but "Old Sherman." This nickname of the camps stuck for life; and he, in the absence of any other surname, finally adopted it himself.

Sherman became in time almost as much of a Father Abraham as Elias Hawley himself. Martha had died during the war, but upon his return he married again without delay; installed himself, rent free, in the cabin he still occupied—on the Major's estate, of course—and began the rearing of a family. Each child, as it came along with almost the regularity of the seasons, was named by its shrewd father after some prominent person in the neighborhood—preferably a Hawley—who was expected to come down handsomely at the christening and on each birthday thereafter, to keep the child in such clothes as it needed, buy it books when it started to school, and set it up in life when it married. Thus, in the course of time, there was an Elias Hawley Sherman, a Ruth Hawley Sherman, a Diana Singleton Sherman, and others. When his second wife died, Sherman took unto himself a third—his junior by twenty years. She bore him three or four more children, and then eloped with a mulatto of her own age.

As is not uncommon in black households, the inmates of Sherman's cabin became so mixed and confused by adoption, desertion, marriage, remarriage and other alliances, that no outsider, not even Major Hawley himself, would have attempted the construction of their genealogical tree. Besides old Sherman himself and the three or four younger children who had not yet



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flown from the nest, there were Cordelia—his eldest daughter and cook at the Hermitage—and her four children (husband missing); Susie, wife of Elias Hawley Sherman, the eldest son of the dusky house (also missing at present and suspected of house-breaking in Barnwell); Susie's baby; two mulatto girls, relics of a previous matrimonial venture of Sherman's third wife, and rather irregular occupants of the cabin, especially at night; and one or two others whose origin a decorous chronicler would prefer not to inquire into too closely.

This black flock drew its sustenance, as a matter of course, from the Hermitage. Four or five of them were officially employed there, while as many more served unofficially and without pay, satisfied with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. On Thanksgiving and Christmas Mrs. Hawley always despatched a great basket to the cabin. But this was merely a conventionality. The basket went just as regularly every other day in the year; and though it was supposed to contain only "scraps"—giving the word a liberal interpretation—Mrs. Hawley knew as well as Cordelia herself that to these were added tea and coffee, a roll or two of butter, and perhaps a dressed chicken. Clothing went just as freely, and though it was supposed to be worn out, Christine's stockings seldom had more than the tiniest hole in them when they reached the calfless shanks of Luce and Zepherine, Cordelia's daughters, or of May and Estelle, the mulattoes.

It was hot; the black occupants of the cabin had scattered to the four quarters of the night, and the

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visitors found Sherman and Susie alone. The latter was propped up in bed, and the old man was reading to her from a tiny Testament. At the foot of the bed, in a rude cradle, lay the invalid's little two-year-old girl.

Susie was a "bright" mulatto, if not indeed a quadroon, with a regularity of features which fairly entitled her to be called beautiful. As she lay with her hands clasped on her breast and her fair arms exposed to the elbow by the short-sleeved night-gown which Chris had given her, any but a practised eye might easily have mistaken her for a full-blood white. The curse which Nature has pronounced upon the alliance of black blood and white had in her case taken the form of consumption; and its ravages were visible in her pale, sunken cheeks.

Between the microscopic type of the Testament and the flickering candle, which he held in one hand, old Sherman's aged eyes were having a hard time of it; and upon the entrance of the visitors he at once slipped a horny forefinger into the book. His skin was a deep oily brown, seamed with countless fine lines, like a shriveled apple. A profound melancholy wrapped him about as a cloak, though this was more seeming than real, for he was still capable of merriment on occasion. His ancient eyes looked out from beneath thick gray brows, and the oily brown pigment of the iris seemed to have melted into the surrounding white. A scant gray growth like moss frosted his cheeks, chin and upper lip.

"She ain't no better, Marse Elias, and she won't be no better till the change of the moon," answered

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old Sherman, in his basso profundo, to the Major's question. "She tuk this cold on the first quarter of the moon, and it ain't agwine to leave her till the new moon is like a slice of watermelon big enough to eat."

"We'll prove you wrong there, Sherman," said the Major cheerily. "I'll have Dr. Berry over here to-morrow morning, and I'll wager you that he won't wait for any watermelon moon." He stepped to the bed and laid his hand on the sick girl's forehead. "She has no fever now. I believe she is better already. What do you say, Susie?"

"I been feelin' better since I et the soup Miss Chris sent over," she answered with a wan smile at Christine. "But I don't guess I'll ever be rightly well again. I'm so tired all the time. Sometimes I think if I could juss lay down in the grave and rest forever, I'd sooner do that than live. I would if it wasn't for her," she added, glancing toward her sleeping babe, while tears slowly filled her eyes.

"What you talk that way for, honey?" asked Sherman gravely. "When the Lawd is ready for you to go he'll let you go. Talkin' about the grave! You's nothin' but a baby yit you'seff. Look at Marse Elias and me, how long we been hyur. *We* ain't tired yit. Leastways, you don't hear us say nothin' about goin'. The good Lawd ain't sent for us yit, and that means he still got work for us to do. He got work for you, too. Who gwine to raise that infunt yander but you? And didn't I juss read you outen the good book how the Lawd put stren'th in the bones of the weak? Don' you b'lieve the good book?"

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"Of cose I b'lieves the good book," answered Susie, meekly, wiping her eyes. "But I know people sometimes die befo' they're ready, and while they still got work to do."

"You are not going to die, my dear," said Christine, encouragingly, slipping into a low chair by the bedside. "You feel blue to-night. In the morning, after you have had a good sleep, the world will look different. Before you took this cold you were stronger than you were a year ago, and looked better. Didn't she, grandfather?"

"She certainly did."

"Didn't she, Uncle Sherman?"

"Yassum, yassum. I done tell her so a hunner times, but she won't b'lieve me."

"Do you need any money, Sherman?" asked Elias.

"No, suh, thank you. The Lawd's providin' for us reasonable well, considerin'."

"Get Susie anything she wants in the way of delicacies, and be sure to buy her any medicine or tonics which the doctor prescribes. Come to me for the money, if necessary. I think we'd better have her food prepared over at the house altogether. Cordelia and Chris will look after it, and one of the children can bring it over. Have you heard from Elias, Susie? Billy told me that he brought you a letter to-day."

"Yes, sir," answered Susie, with a slight flush, as if she would rather have kept the letter a secret. "He's in St. Louis, workin' on the docks. He says it's very hard and he's afraid he can't stand it much longer."

Old Jubilee snorted contemptuously. "Can't stan'

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it, and built like a muss-ox! If he had a whip over his back, he'd stan' it."

"Did he send you any money?" asked the Major.

"Yes, sir—a little."

"How much?"

"Two dollars," she answered, with another flush.

"And he's been away two months," observed the Major with a frown. "I wonder what he expects you to live on."

"He expects her to live offen his ole daddy," grumbled Sherman. "But she's welcome. She's arned all she gits here, and mo' too. She's a-trillin' and a-warblin' all the time when she ain't sick, and we couldn't git along without her nohow. But *him*! I larn him to whitewash; I larn him to cyarpenter; I larn him to blacksmiff. And now he's pushin' a truck on a dock, along with a lot of black hawgs from New O'leans, and complainin' that it hu'ts his back! Why don't he use his haid instead of his back? I done larn him how."

Susie's eyes flashed defiantly under this arraignment of her husband, but she said nothing.

"You may tell Elias, Susie," said the Major, "that if he will come home and live an honest, industrious life, I will undertake to see that he is not molested by the law. I never believed that he was implicated in that burglary; but at the same time there are a good many people itching to get their hands on him, if they can do it legally. The first break he makes will probably land him behind the bars; and if he isn't prepared to settle down, he had better stay away."

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"People are down on Elias, Major Hawley, and don't give him no chance," said Susie, sulkily.

"No, they are not, Susie," answered the Major, sternly. "He has been given every chance there was, and I'll give him one more now. I'll give him work here on the farm, and he can keep away from town until this escapade has blown over."

"Marster, I don' want you to do nothin' mo' for him," spoke up Sherman. "You done do too much now. If he comes back hyuh and goes to work, how you know he gwine to stay, or do what he say? How you know he ain't gwine to steal you' cawn, or drive you' hawgs off in the woods, or lift you' poultry? No, I don't want you to take any mo' chances. I done washed my hands of him myself, and I want you to do the same."

Jubilee followed his visitors out, and hobbling down the path as far as the gate he scanned the black heavens and predicted a storm. The aspect was certainly ominous. Not a leaf moved; the heat was almost as oppressive as at five o'clock, and an unnatural greenish light was creeping above the northwestern horizon. As the Major and Christine neared the house, a puff of wind slapped their faces. Others quickly followed. A low moaning, as of fear, came out of the tall cottonwood under which they had paused to observe the agitated heavens. The insect chorus was suddenly hushed, and each little invisible musician doubtless hurried for some snug hole in earth or bark. Across the prairie came a low sullen roar, like that of a distant train; and a moment later a gale sprang upon them like a

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panther. The apple-trees bowed their rounded heads low, accompanied by a mad stripping of leaves and snapping of twigs and the thud of falling fruit. A cloud of dust enveloped the pair in its stifling folds, and sucked out their lantern.

Christine, terrified by the cannonade of lightning overhead, emitted a cry of alarm. But the old man calmly drew her close to him, soothed her with a reassuring word, and led her on. They reached the veranda as the first big drops pattered down.

"Now let it pour!" exclaimed Elias.

But the disturbance turned out to be merely another make-believe of the drought. In five minutes the wind had fallen, and before they went to bed the stars were out.

Christine, after her grandparents' good-night kiss, climbed the stairs with a heart whose heaviness she could scarcely explain. Her grandfather had not mentioned Colfax's name, but his reference to Colfax was so pointed, and he had approached the subject so solemnly, invoking to his aid memories so sacred and so painful to him, that Chris felt a chill about her heart. She seemed to see the gathering of two forces between which her happiness might be crushed as an egg-shell between boulders, and before she went to sleep her pillow was wet with tears.

## CHAPTER VI

THE object of these tears—though Christine might possibly have denied him to be such—sat in his office a few days later with his feet cocked on the window-sill and his eyes fixed on the court-house across the way. A Greek portico, with four imposing white columns, formed the façade of the building. Between the two central columns stood the bronze figure of General Marcus Aurelius Pembroke, that doughty Indian fighter and unrivaled judge of whisky who had given Pembroke County its name. The General's right hand rested lightly on his hip-pocket, but whether to draw his pistol or his flask—neither of which he had ever been without in life—was a disputed question among local art critics. Sparrows roosted nightly on his flowing mustache and Apollo curls, in the shelter of his broad-brimmed hat; loafers struck matches on the calf of his sturdy leg; and occasionally some ruffian would shoot a quid of tobacco against his inoffensive cheek.

It was a peaceful scene, largely accounted for by the heat, which was already, at nine o'clock, rising in visible palpitations from the street. Through a window Colfax could see County Clerk Pelham stretched on a leather couch, fast asleep, while his clerk—who also happened to be his niece—languidly stitched at some



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fancy work. In another room, Burke Keeler the sheriff was playing solitaire, with a pipe in his mouth. On a wooden bench, in the shade outside, some old men whittled and swapped yarns of the "early days," and Colfax could plainly hear their cackling laughter at intervals. A line of loafers sat with their spines pressed close to the cool foundation stones of the building, lazily talking and discharging tobacco-juice at regular periods.

Presently a lank individual followed by two hounds crossed the court-house square. Colfax at once clapped on his hat, closed his windows—he expected to be gone two days—and met the man at the foot of the stairs.

"A good hot day for our drive, Fisher," he observed.

"It will be hotter in Panther bottom," answered the other, cheerfully. "Them fellers from the Nawth will sweat like hell before they're thoo."

"Let them sweat. How did you come in?"

"By mule. I just put him up at Halleck's. I suppose you boys will pay for his keep."

"Certainly. Candidates never refuse to pay for anything."

He untied the span of blacks which were attached to a carriage and drove around to the Lincoln House, on the other side of the square. The two gentlemen who waited on the porch, smoking, bore ample evidence of being exotic to Pembroke County. They had more girth and color than the average native, and wore double-breasted frock coats and silk hats, in which they looked exceedingly warm and uncomfortable. Fisher

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Wolverton's eyes lingered on these garments curiously but unobtrusively. Had the gentlemen been clad in armor of the tenth century, he would have shown no surprise.

"Fisher," said Colfax, as the gentlemen descended to the carriage, "this is Mr. Harrison, Republican candidate for Supreme Court Clerk, and Mr. Bentley, member of Congress from Chicago, helping Mr. Harrison out. Gentlemen, Mr. Fisher Wolverton, who is to be our guide to-day and to-morrow. He knows every foot of Panther and Ox Bow bottoms, and guarantees to drive us safely through to Butcher Knife, after the speeches to-night, and find us a habitation fit for a white man. There are no hotels, you know," he added, with a twinkle of enjoyment.

"We old campaigners are used to roughing it, Mr. Colfax," said Mr. Harrison jovially, giving Wolverton's bony hand as tight a grip as his puffy palm could muster. Mr. Bentley, with a honeyed smile, presented another puffy palm, and then the two old campaigners climbed into the rear seat.

The fine yellow dust which lay four inches deep in the road, rose behind the briskly moving carriage in an elongated cloud, like the tail of a comet. Across the prairie similar clouds were visible for miles around, above other roads; while the impalpable remains of many a former cloud still hung in the atmosphere like a haze, which nothing short of a heavy rain would precipitate. Every farmer's team which they passed kicked up a suffocating fog; and in a short time the broad, slightly stooped shoulders of the candidates had changed from

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black to gray. Colfax's neutral flannel suit underwent no visible change. As for Wolverton, dust had long since done its worst for him.

The last had worn a coat, out of some vague notion of "dressing up" for the distinguished strangers; but he soon removed this burdensome and unaccustomed garment. The act exposed a six-shooter over one gaunt hip. A prominent lump over the other hip proved to be a box of cartridges and a plug of tobacco. The Chicagoans exchanged knowing looks, as if prepared for just this sort of picturesque thing; but Mr. Harrison's smile seemed to have lost some of its spontaneity. A moment later he opened his suit-case and took out a small glass and a bottle of whisky.

"Gents, will you lubricate?"

Wolverton tossed off the brimming glass like spring-water, but Colfax politely refused. The other two men each took a stiff dram. Mr. Harrison's hand was noticeably steadier after this. He lit another of his black Havana cigars, after passing them to the front seat, and began a story.

It was interrupted, as they approached a hovel, by a lean wolf-hound which shot with catapultic force through a gap in the fence and sprang at the horses' throats. The gentlemen in the back seat never knew just how it happened, but there was a gleam of blue steel, a deafening explosion, and two or three neck-breaking lunges from the frightened horses. Then the carriage was standing still, a dead dog lay in the dust, Wolverton was slipping a fresh cartridge into his gun, and a torrent of profanity and obscenity was pouring

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from the mouth of a dirty woman stationed in the hovel's front door.

"That's all right, Mrs. Briggs," observed Fisher, complacently, as he spat into the dust and with his sleeve wiped some powder stains from his trusty weapon. "Whenever your old man gits ready to shoot *me*, he knows where I live. He ain't been around to see me, though, since lambs was of a convenient size to tote off. Unfortunately, I had retired the last time he come before he got there, or his reception would have been more cordialer than it was. I hate to be lackin' in warmth, especially on an occasion of that kind. Drive on, Norm."

The drought had apparently not affected the orchards. The apple-trees were bending and in some cases breaking with their weight of fruit, and the perfume which floated across the road was scarcely less sweet than that of May, when every tree was a cloud of pink and white bloom. With the pear-trees also the slender virgin forms of spring had yielded to the breadth and fulness of impending maternity; and many of the limbs which had lifted their blossoms heavenward, like maidens with an offering at a shrine, now sagged to the ground. Stacks of grain and hay dotted the landscape, and here and there a thresher was at work. Corn alone, of all the cereals, yet stood in unbroken ranks, with pumpkins gleaming between.

"Norm," said Wolverton, in a tone not intended for the back seat, as they approached Beaumont, "I ain't easy about them stove-pipe hats. They'll go all right in Raccoon with the niggers, but I'm juberous about

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the Hog Back and Ox Bow boys standin' for 'em, especially if they're liquored up. Them Prince Alberts will go all right because the preachers wear 'em, and the boys are broke to 'em. And the hats *may* go, too. But if the boys are feelin' just right and pretty well tanked, they might shoot 'em up, which would prove embarrassin' to the gents unless their nerve is better than I size it up to be. I hate to have you *say* anything—it sounds kind of countrified—but I'd really feel easier if they stowed them tall head-pieces and got something here in Beaumont that was soft and more becomin'-like."

Throughout this confidence, delivered out of the corner of Fisher's mouth, Colfax showed signs of choking. His cheeks flushed, his throat worked convulsively, and there was a peculiar trembling in the region of his stomach which finally caught Fisher's eye.

"You look like a man that was bustin' to laff," he observed, suspiciously.

"I am. I was thinking of a funny thing that happened once when I made a speech at Fox Grove Church. I'll tell you about it when I get a chance."

He swung about with one arm over the back of the seat and tactfully communicated Wolverton's apprehensions to the gentlemen. They ha-ha'd with that fine appreciation of a joke which candidates develop about election time. But when they found that Colfax was in earnest, they assented to the proposition to change their head-gear with an affability and promptitude which nearly set Colfax off again. The carriage was therefore driven up to Beaumont's general store, and a

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couple of broad-brimmed hats—the only kind in stock—were purchased.

Raccoon Hollow was well named. The hamlet swarmed with negroes, and the carriage had hardly stopped in front of the only public house in town—a fly-blown restaurant—before a greasy black fellow in plaids strutted up and thrust out a coffee-colored palm to Colfax. Colfax accepted the palm without shrinking and passed it on to the back seat.

“Mr. Colfax,” began the Jim Crow politician with the air of a man whose voice is music to his own ears, “I hates to trouble you, seein’ as you is just about to ’light from your journey; but I brung my delegation over from Rabbit Foot airly this mawnin’ under the abstract impression that you and our other friends hyere in the vehicle was to speak this fo’noon. The humiliatin’ facts is, the boys ain’t had no dinner, as I, under the erroneous misconception of your letter, failed to provide myself with the necessary funds. As it’s already consid’able past the noon meridium by my chronometer,” he concluded, dragging a massive silver watch from his yellow plush vest, “I thought you and the other two gemplum might help us out.”

With practised grace, Mr. Harrison slipped a thumb and forefinger into his vest-pocket and drew out a bill. Mr. Bagley bowed low, poured out a profusion of stilted thanks, and walked briskly off.

“Let me be your disbursing officer after this, Mr. Harrison,” said Colfax. “I know these fellows, and can make your money go further. Bagley will feed his delegation at ten cents a head.”

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The travelers were shown to a table in the far end of the wretched eating-house, where not a breath of air could reach them. The flies swarmed by the million. Along a counter, under glass covers, was strung a line of petrified sandwiches, dusty doughnuts, and pies of grim and ancient mien. The politicians' table was evidently reserved for guests of honor, for it was the only one which bore a cloth. This concession to elegance, however, was as coarse as gunny-sack, blotched with catchup and coffee, and black around the edges from the elbows of numerous diners in the past. To cap the climax, the politicians had scarcely sat down before a rabble of guffawing, tipsy blacks—the delegation from Rabbit Foot—stampeded into the room, with the smiling Bagley in their midst, and filled the remaining tables, the lunch-counter, and every available nook and corner.

“Is there any danger of that black fellow coming over here to eat with us?” asked Mr. Bentley, who had already fortified his stomach against the odoriferous throng by a liberal potation from a flask in his hip pocket.

“No, I don't think there be,” answered Wolverton, quietly.

“I forgot to explain to you gentlemen,” said Colfax, laughing, “that Fisher is a Democrat and draws the color-line a little more closely than some of us Republicans—a fact with which Mr. Bagley is no doubt familiar.”

“I was given to understand, Mr. Colfax, that everybody drew the color-line in Southern Illinois,” said Mr.

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Harrison, with a slight show of temper. The heat and the present environment were evidently proving too much for his amiability.

"They do—except during campaigns. I'll take a pull at that bottle myself, now," he added to Bentley, feeling an ominous uneasiness in his stomach.

They hurried through a sloppy meal of corn-bread, buttermilk, onions, bacon, potatoes and coffee, and then sought the fresh air. But they were not before Bagley, who was standing at the door with a sandwich in his black paw. He beckoned Colfax aside; and as a result of this conference, the latter slipped two silver dollars into the coffee-colored palm.

"Drinks," explained Colfax to Harrison. "Rabbit Foot is a thirsty town."

Raccoon was not a pivotal point, politically, and the speeches in the schoolhouse were short in spite of the vociferous applause of the audience, three-fourths of whom were black. By three o'clock the carriage was under way again, on the narrow, grass-grown road to Panther Creek. The road wound about considerably to avoid swamps and to find the shallowest places across the numerous runs. So devious was it, in fact, that Fisher at one time confessed his perplexity and inquired the way of a wood-chopper. The man sank his double-bitted ax in a stump before answering, took a chew, and deliberately sat down. It was not often that he got a chance to talk with strangers.

"Go south a half, pardner, west a quarter, and south another half. Angle southwest about forty rods, till the road forks. Take the likeliest fork—I forgit



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jist which one it is—go down into a bottom, climb a hill on t'other side, and you'll come to a white house. If that house is Newt Lammer's you're on the road to Panther. If it ain't, by G—d, you're lost."

They did not get lost but arrived safely at Panther about four o'clock, where some more speeches were made. To Mr. Harrison's surprise, the audience contained scarcely a dozen negroes. At Ox Bow, which they reached with the sun still an hour high, not a negro was in sight. Instead, lank, long-haired natives, whose skin, boots and clothing were of one color with the yellow dust, stood about the corners of the single street and in front of the saloons, chewing silently, expectorating freely, and eying the carriage with carefully assumed indifference.

"These people won't tolerate negroes," explained Colfax. "Most of them originally came from the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee, where they learned to hate slavery, which made no provision for poor whites in its social system, and incidentally the slaves themselves. Many of them migrated to Indiana first, like Lincoln's parents, and drifted over to Illinois in the second generation. They were originally Scotch-Irish, as nearly as I can make out, though some claim they are the descendants of the jail-birds which England so generously contributed by the shipload, in the seventeenth century, to build up her struggling American colonies. Whatever their origin, they afford a good example of arrested civilization, being anywhere from fifty to two hundred years behind the times, according to the test applied. But they all have a vote," he added slyly.

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The schoolhouse was packed by eight o'clock, and the speakers had to make their way to the platform through aisles blocked with dogs and sleeping babies. Wolverton had been undecided whether to remain outside and see that no young rowdies took the wheels off the carriage, or to sit on the platform, where his well-known presence and reputation as a "dead shot" would exercise a salutary influence over the "boys." But their host for the night finally found a deaf and dumb man—the only man in Ox Bow willing to miss the speeches—who promised to guard the carriage. Fisher thereupon joined the distinguished group in front—to the relief of at least two of the speakers.

The audience, however, proved both orderly and attentive. Some of the hearers had ridden fifteen miles on horseback, the chairman whispered to the speakers; and there was a wistful, hungry look—intellectual, not physical, hunger—in their eyes which spurred even the stolid candidate for the Supreme Court Clerkship to something like eloquence. Bentley and Colfax followed with stirring speeches; and even Wolverton, as unemotional as an Indian and a life-long Democrat, confessed afterward to sharing in the enthusiasm. Yet there was not a hand-clap from beginning to end; just a motionless, unblinking attention. Only once was there an emphatic expression of approbation, and that was when a tall fellow leaped to his feet with a whoop and let a .44 ball from his six-shooter through the ceiling. A baby or two woke up and cried, and a dog barked; otherwise this unconventional applause excited no attention whatever.

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After the meeting, though, the young bucks mounted their wiry little horses and thundered up and down the main street for an hour, yelling like Comanches, and discharging their pistols in the air, with an occasional halt to slake their burning thirst in a draught which was sure to make them thirst again. Whether these demonstrations were commendatory or otherwise, the speakers had no means of knowing; but as nobody "shot them up" after they had gone to bed in the sweltering loft of their host's two-roomed house, the sage and unbiased Wolverton was of the opinion that they had left a good impression.

Two more meetings were held the next day—one at noon, at Breeze; the other about two o'clock, at Hog Back Church—and then, with a sigh of relief from everybody, the carriage was headed for home, fifteen miles distant. As they crossed the little Cairo & Northern railroad at a siding called Orchard, a group of people on the platform—a most unusual sight at Orchard—and a passenger train a short distance down the track, leaning at an angle which was rare even on the unballasted C. & N., attracted their attention.

"Looks like a wreck," said Colfax. "I'll run over and see about it."

Almost the first person he saw was Christine Hawley, coming down the platform toward him. Her face was flushed, although she was clothed in the coolest of summer fabrics.

"Norman Colfax, I was never so glad to see any one in my life!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Where in the world did you come from?"

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"Campaigning. What's the matter with that train?"

"Nothing much—just the regular bi-weekly derailment, I believe. No one was hurt—the C. & N. never permits a speed that would prove dangerous in case of an accident, you know. Nobody seems to have the slightest idea how long it will take to get the train back on the track. They have been working at it for two hours now. I have walked up and down the track a quarter of a mile in each direction, and read all the signs in the waiting-room. I had just begun to count the planks in the platform when I saw you coming. I had hopes that you were going to see me through," she added, coquettishly. "But of course you will have to go back in that carriage with those horrible Republican friends of yours. Have you been riding on the front seat with that unspeakable Fisher Wolverton?"

"Yes. Fisher, by the way, belongs in your fold," he observed, slyly. "He's a Democrat, dyed-in-the-wool, cloven-hoofed, ring-tailed and horned. Where have you been?"

"St. Louis. Aunt Bertha and Uncle Granville expected to get in from Texas last night, for the reunion. I went to meet them and to do a little shopping also. But they didn't come, and it was so hot in the stores."

"It has been hot everywhere." He glanced at the derailed train and then at the waiting carriage, ponderingly. "If I were sure that you hadn't shopped to the extent of more than half a ton, I would propose something," he remarked, oracularly.

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"Please do, then. The package is very small—considering," said she, appealingly.

"What do you say to my sending the politicians on home with Wolverton—pleading, as my excuse, a lady in distress—and walking over to Ned Parmiston's farm, borrowing his horse and buggy, and taking you back to town?"

"Norman, it will be simply divine!" she exclaimed, happily. "It's getting cooler now and the ride will be delightful."

While Colfax was gone, Christine had the railroad agent telegraph to Barnwell that Billy Million, who was doubtless waiting for her at the station there, might go home. Then, to save time, she walked up the track to the train and got her parcel, which was bulky but not heavy. Thirty minutes later it was stowed under the seat of Ned Parmiston's new buggy, and the couple were bowling smoothly along over the dirt road, between the tall rank growth of the fence-rows, and along the edge of old pastures knee-deep with the golden Spanish-needle. Once they passed a little white schoolhouse, tightly shuttered, broiling in the sun, and besieged by an army of weeds which had already taken the very doorstep.

"It is the business of the school trustees to cut those weeds in the fall," observed Colfax; "but as likely as not the job will fall to the lot of some big boy who is half in love with his teacher, and will be fully in love with her before the fall term is out. He will also claim the privilege of building fires in the morning. As a reward, the teacher, who probably boards at his house,

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will allow him to walk home with her. Learning will take on a new and wonderful charm for him, and his hitherto dreamless, boyish sleep will be woven through and through with the sweetest and brightest visions vouchsafed to man."

"Why, Norman!" laughed Christine. "I didn't suppose you capable of a burst like that without the inspiration of a jury-box."

"Few of us get credit for the sentiment we really possess," he observed, in a serio-comic manner. "I suppose it is our own fault, for most of us keep the hatches of our hearts battened down as tightly as a cotton-steamer's with a fire in its hold."

"How about the pretty little teacher?—for of course she is pretty. Will she, too, have dreams?"

"Yes, but alas! not of the big boy. They'll be of some spectacled professor whom she met at the normal school, where she attended for a term or two."

"That reminds me of some dreams that I had once," ventured Christine, with a flush which Colfax was certain would have put a rose to shame. "Do you remember the night, some years ago, when a party of us went out to a chicken-pie supper at Turtle Town Hall, in bobsleds, after the big snowfall?"

"Yes. You were only a little girl then—about sixteen. The bobsleds were crowded, and at the request of your Aunt Milly I took you home in my cutter. Wasn't it a hardship to ride with an old fellow like me? I was older then, relatively, than now, you know."

Christine laughed. "Yes. I'll tell you just what I thought: I was afraid the girls would tease me about

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having such an *old* beau. Then, when you began to talk to me as seriously as if I were your equal in age, I was frightened half to death. I was sure that anything which I might say would sound utterly infantile to you. But after a little I got over my fright and began to enjoy myself, and before we got home I was simply lost in admiration of your beautiful talk. If you had only known, Norman, what an innocent little worshiper sat there by your side that night, your pride might have translated you into a chariot of fire. I lay awake a long time after going to bed, and when I went to sleep I dreamt of you. I thought of you the first thing in the morning, and for a week my heart leaped every time I met you on the street. About that time you had a case in court, and I remember I cried because grandpa wouldn't let me go to hear your argument. He said a court-room was no place for a girl."

"And now you have forgotten it all."

"That girlish foolishness, yes," said she, dropping her eyes.

"But aren't there some things, Chris, that have happened since that time which you haven't forgotten?"

"Many. But, Norman," she added entreatingly, "let's not discuss that again. Somehow, whenever we get on that theme, it makes me unhappy."

"Is it what I *say* or what I *feel* that distresses you?" he asked, pointedly. "I feel just as much when I don't talk about it as when I do."

"That's unkind, Norman," said she, reproachfully. "I have thought a great deal about what you said

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the other night—more, probably, than you would believe. Perhaps I was not quite frank with you then. Grandfather's feelings toward you, which we spoke of at Di's, have been such that I have never thought of you other than as a friend. He has made them plain to me, especially of late, since you and I have chanced to be together oftener than usual. His attitude is a matter of the deepest regret to me, yet I cannot entirely disregard it. I—that is why—you can see how painful this subject is to me," she ended appealingly.

Colfax was silent for a moment, gently flicking one of the thills with the whip.

"What do you wish me to do—cease to come to see you?" he asked in a constrained tone.

"Now I have provoked you!" she exclaimed regretfully.

"No, you haven't. But after what you have just said, in connection with what I told you at Di's the other night, my position is a rather embarrassing one. I feel something like a tethered dog—free to move in any direction until I reach the end of my rope, and then sure of a choking if I try to go further."

"I am sure that figure doesn't express the situation at all truthfully," protested Christine.

"It's simply a question of whether or not you intend to abdicate your rights as a woman, and turn them over to your grandfather," answered Colfax, emphatically. "If you do, I have no doubts as to what his course will be. He is a first-class dictator."

"You mustn't talk against grandfather to me," said she, gently. "And to show you that you have mis-



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understood my attitude and grandfather's, too, I hereby invite you to attend the family dinner on Thursday."

It was not customary for outsiders to be present at this dinner, and an invitation to it was a sure mark of favor. Chris had originally intended to invite Colfax, but since the talk with her grandfather she had been gravely debating the expediency of such a step. The invitation had now slipped out impulsively, on the spur of the moment.

"I thank you, Chris," answered Colfax, "and I'll come if you are sure it will be for the best."

"I am sure," said she, but her heart did not confirm the words. As a matter of fact she knew that her grandfather would much rather that Colfax should not be there.

When they reached the boundary-line of the Hermitage, a mile and a half from the house, Christine suggested that they drive by the family graveyard, which had just been trimmed and otherwise set in order. A pleasant ride of fifteen minutes through woods and meadows brought them to the spot. A large chestnut-tree stood within the brick walls of the God's-acre. Each fall, after the flowers were gone, this tree spread a brown coverlet over the sleeping dead, so that when the November rains fell, and the wind raged, and the limbs of the tree leaped in fear and cracked loudly in the cold, all beneath was warm and dry.

The stone which marked the grave of Christine's mother bore the simple word "Eva"; below were the dates of her birth and her death, and between them a severed heart—this and nothing more. Such was the

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biting epitaph which had been chiseled under Elias Hawley's wet but stern eye. Wild roses, still in bloom, covered the mound with an impenetrable mat. A trumpet-vine had climbed the stone and now flaunted its blood-red flowers in the air.

For a moment the couple stood without words, knee-deep in the tall feathery grass. No bird-calls floated on the quivering heat; only the strident notes of insects rose from the neighboring fields. Dreamily, as from a great distance, came familiar farm noises—the crowing of cocks, the lowing of a cow, the barking of a dog. The rattle of a remote reaper, like the chittering of a gigantic grasshopper; the faint, faraway whistle of a locomotive; the rumble of a wagon on the public road, half a mile off—these were the only sounds which came to the hallowed spot.

“Norman, I am going to ask you something that I couldn't ask anybody else,” murmured Christine. “I ask it because I have a right to know the truth, and believe that you will tell it to me. Was my father considered a bad man?” The earnest eyes which she fixed upon Colfax were not a child's, to be either evaded, deceived or denied.

“Your father, Chris,” answered Colfax gravely, “committed an offense which is punishable by imprisonment in the penitentiary. He accepted a bribe in the legislature. I have heard that he was not aware of what he was doing until the railroad, from which he accepted the bribe, had him in its power. As to that, I don't know; but I have no doubt that if he had been brought to trial he would have been found guilty. Yet

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I seriously question whether very many people, outside of your own family, consider your father a bad man. And I am sure that he would have been a better man to-day if it hadn't been for the unforgiving nature of your grandfather."

Christine's eyes filled with tears.

"No one knows better than I the depth of grandfather's prejudices," said she, sadly, "and his terrible inexorableness when he thinks he is right. Yet he tries to be good. He *is* good."

As they drove up to the house, Major Hawley rose from his seat on the veranda and went inside. Christine suspected that his purpose was to avoid meeting Colfax, and she gathered from the dull flush on Colfax's cheek that he also suspected as much. For a moment she was vexed with her beloved grandsire.

"Don't forget the dinner," said she, solicitously. "I shall be deeply disappointed if you fail to come."

At the supper table, Christine explained her presence with Colfax.

"I suppose he and those other politicians were pouring Republicanism and popskull whisky into those black rascals at Raccoon and Rabbit Foot," observed the Major, caustically.

Zepherine, the black table-girl, snickered; but Christine made no answer, and the meal was finished in comparative silence. After supper, however, when the old man had lit his pipe and stood on the veranda steps—straight and tall, a picture of marvelously prolonged health and vigor—he called Christine from the ham-

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mock. She advanced deliberately, and paused six feet away.

"What is it?" she asked, civilly but coldly.

"Come here," said he. And when she was within arm's reach he drew her to him and added: "I want you to look at my castles in Spain," and pointed to the fiery, sunset clouds.

It was only a pretext, of course, to bring her to his side. He did not ask her forgiveness for his caustic words at the table, but she knew that that was what he wanted. She could almost feel the appeal oozing from the strong arms about her body. So she smiled up at him; he kissed her, and the incident was closed.

Afterward she lay in the hammock a long time and let her mind play with vagrant fancies, as many a maid has done before. The south wind blew pleasantly against her cheek. To her it was no mere atmospheric disturbance, no meteorological phenomenon. To her as to the Greek, it was a spirit. It had crossed land and sea; had souged through mountain pines and lapped the dew from tropical palms. It had kissed the ripening fruit, rippled the fields of grain, and dallied with the sweet breath of honeysuckle and rose. It had ruffled the feathers of sleeping birds, and rocked the nestlings in their airy cradle. It had romped in the mows of garnered hay, and come forth scented as a bride. It had wrinkled the waters of the brook, rustled the sedge, tossed the plumed grass of the meadow with its myriad arms, leaped the rail fences like a hoydenish girl, and now was blowing Christine's hair about her temples with elfin mischief.

## CHAPTER VII

MAJOR HAWLEY's birthday dawned bright and clear. Cordelia and her sable crew turned out of bed at the first gray light in the east, almost before the birds began to pipe one another up. The evening before a calf, two lambs, and a shote had been butchered. The chickens had been left till morning; but as soon as Billy had a good fire going under the big copper kettle in the yard, he began to wield his hatchet. The girls scalded and plucked the "friers" as fast as they were killed; and when their fat yellow bodies had been piled four deep on a convenient bench, Cordelia waddled out, rested her hands on her broad hips, and surveyed the supply critically.

"You better kill five mo', Billy," said she. "Ole Mis' allowed twenty would do, but that pile looks scandalous small to me when I think of all them Hawleys gethered hyere. I wouldn't have them platters git down to necks and backs at *dinner*-time for nothin' on this uth."

Mrs. Hawley herself was in the kitchen by six o'clock. By seven, the guests, dressed in the coolest wear, began to assemble on veranda and lawn. They came not only from the house, but from the carriage-shed and the "help house." Some of the young bloods

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had even slept in the great mow of the barn, declaring it a privilege, and emerged with the sweet smell of clover hay upon them. From a stroll in the dewy garden appeared Elias Hawley and his brother, Senator Granville Hawley of Texas, arm in arm, beaming like school-boys, and chuckling over reminiscences of the long, long ago.

The senator was the younger by two years but would have passed for Elias's twin. As Christine came up in a pale blue morning gown, looking as fresh as a sprite from a drop of dew, Granville seized her with both hands, lifted her level with his six feet and two inches, and planted a hearty kiss on each of her cheeks. Then tossing her with giant strength to his brother, he made a dash at a bevy of tempting young beauties, and enclosed as many as he could in his outstretched arms. They did not struggle very hard to escape, and he succeeded in retaining for a morning kiss at least as many as any one man was entitled to. Next, with unabated spirits, he took the face of a tall, slender Louisville girl between his hands, and pressed her rosy cheeks together until her puckered mouth resembled a rosebud.

"Mary, you are the living image of your blessed mother, twenty-seven years ago!" he cried gaily. "I know, for I held her cheeks one morning in Lexington, twenty-seven years ago the fifteenth of next month, just as I am holding yours this minute. I was a mere boy of fifty then."

"Doubtless that was the reason mamma permitted the liberty," retorted the sprightly young woman.

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"Speaking of resemblances," she added with a mischievous twinkle, "do you know, Uncle Granville, that you remind me very much of Daniel Webster."

"And what is there about me that reminds you of that famous statesman?" asked the old gentleman, half flattered, half suspicious.

"Your breath, uncle," swiftly answered the rogue, and fled.

A chorus of soprano laughter greeted the sally, and the senator made a rush at his fair tormentor.

"You witch! I've had nothing but a thimbleful of blackberry brandy this morning—not enough to stimulate a babe. I'll leave it to brother Elias." Whereupon he punished her with a kiss.

Shortly after breakfast, Diana Singleton drove up in her phaeton, with a load of dishes, napkins, and silverware, for even the vast supply of these things at the Hermitage was not sufficient for this occasion. Mrs. Lyman Hawley arrived a few minutes later, with a similar load. Both ladies had entertained a large company—the overflow from the Hermitage—at their homes over night; and both now repaired, after a short season of kissing and handshaking among the relatives, to the kitchen. Here was a busy and appetizing scene—the slamming of oven doors, the thump of spoons in mixing bowls, the kneading of ponderous heaps of dough, the hiss of grease, the rush of feet and swish of skirts, the whirr of egg-beaters, the rattle of chopping-knives in wooden bowls, and Cordelia's loud commands as she paddled about with floury face and hands. The aroma which floated out of the doors and win-

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dows made Billy Million's mouth water as far away as the wood-pile.

All forenoon guests arrived in a straggling line of carriages and wagonettes stretching from the village to the Hermitage and interlarded with delivery-wagons bearing belated orders of groceries. At two o'clock, one hundred and sixty-two people, according to Diana's count, sat down to dinner under the trees. Three long improvised tables were required. Elias Hawley sat at the head of the first, Granville Hawley at the second, and Lyman Hawley at the third. At the foot of the first sat Mrs. Lyman Hawley—a tall, black-haired beauty, altogether too young-looking and splendid, it would seem, for her slow, blundering husband. Mrs. Elias Hawley faced the senator, and Diana Singleton sat opposite her Uncle Lyman.

At a signal from Elias, Senator Hawley rose, lifted his arms to hush the babble of conversation, bowed his fine white head, and in his sweet, resonant voice said grace in a tone audible to all. Cordelia, with her big black hand to her ear, stood at the kitchen door, listening. At the "Amen" she passed a command; and before the senator had fairly sat down again a cohort of black waitresses advanced upon the tables with trays of steaming tomato soup.

No particular order was observed in the serving of the dinner. Fried chicken, roast turkey, lamb, veal, and shote; bowls of thick whitish gravy and thin brown gravy; succotash and macaroni; potatoes, both Irish and sweet, in every conceivable style; pickles and preserves, jams and jellies, of every hue and flavor; sliced



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tomatoes, cucumbers, and roasting-ears; corn-bread and wheat-bread, biscuits and rolls; golden butter and tempting combs of honey; sweet milk and buttermilk, iced-tea and coffee—these good things flowed in a stream both wide and deep from kitchen to tables until Lyman Hawley, with his napkin tucked in his fat red neck, called the length of the board: “Mother, head off your waiters and give us a chance to eat!”

When the last person had ceased to make a pretense of eating, Elias Hawley rose, after his custom, and made a short speech, genial and full of tenderness, but with no attempt at wit. Senator Hawley followed. The family knew him too well to expect one of the polished orations which had made the State of Texas proud to return him to the United States Senate for five successive terms. Such a speech would have been out of place, and he simply gave them a little fatherly talk, much after the style of his brother Elias.

The third speaker to rise was Captain Edward Maynard, of Memphis—a little wiry man, presumably not of Hawley blood, which had a tendency to build on Samsonian proportions. In his hands he held a small pasteboard box which until this moment had rested, unnoticed, beneath his chair. This box he deposited beside his plate in a careful and impressive manner, as if it might have contained dynamite, and cleared his throat. An expectant hush fell over the company.

“My friends,” he began, “fifty-five years ago the eighteenth of next October, a party of young people were on their way to a singing-school in Prince George County, Virginia. In the course of their journey they

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had to cross the Blackwater River, which at this point was only a good-sized creek; and in descending the steep bank one of the girls slipped from her horse and fell into the water."

He paused with a facetious twinkle. Some of the older people who had heard the story before, glanced smilingly toward Grandmother Tredegar. But that venerable woman was earnestly watching Captain Eddy, with one hand behind her ear, and seemed unconscious as yet of any allusion to herself.

"The water must have been at least a foot deep, and you will realize that her danger was imminent. One of the young gallants instantly swung off his horse, took his fair and dripping partner in his arms, and carried her to the further shore. Now, I should explain that near the schoolhouse where the singing-lessons were given was a spring to which the pupils used to repair to cool their heated throats, or, as some of the boys would say, to wet their whistles. The girls, unable to kneel and drink as the boys did, often carried drinking vessels of one kind or another, but preferably a gourd.

"Now, it happened that the young lady who fell into the Blackwater on this night had with her one of these gourds, made by her own hands, and naturally neat and small, so that she could slip the handle through her belt, or into her bosom. Just how it came about, I cannot say, not having been present; but the pair—rescuer and rescued—finally fell behind the other riders, and *one* of the results of this lingering was the presentation to him of her gourd, as a mark of her grati-

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tude, no doubt, and perhaps a souvenir of the occasion. To make the thing mutual, he gave her a buckeye which he always carried to keep off the rheumatism. She dropped it blushing into her bosom, in the absence of a pocket—so the story goes—and so warm was it, as it lay there, that it is an actual fact that from that day to this she has never had a twinge of rheumatism.

“What else they exchanged, if anything, is not recorded. But before I go any further, I should like to ask all who were in that singing-school party of the long, long ago, away back in old tide-water Virginia, to arise.”

Three old grandames, Grandmother Tredegar among them, slowly rose to their feet, followed by Senator Hawley. A respectful silence fell over the assembly; and a wave of reverential tenderness swept through Christine’s bosom as her fancy ran back to the distant day when these three shrunken, trembling old women were bright-eyed, fresh-faced, laughing girls, full-blooded, always ready for a frolic, and delighted to give their horses a free rein in a wild scamper over the roads of old Prince George.

“I was one of the young men in that party,” observed Senator Hawley, with a smile, “but not *the* young man, I regret to say.”

At the laugh which followed, a delicate flush overspread the features of Grandmother Tredegar. Then she retorted, in her low, sweet voice, and with a roguish gleam:

“It was my opinion, Ran, from Sally Tewksbury’s blushes, when you and she returned from the spring,

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that you weren't so terribly unfortunate that night, or particularly regretted not being *the* young man."

"Now, folks," continued Captain Eddy, uncovering his pasteboard box, "I just want to add that I have here that very gourd which Grandmother Tredegar gave Uncle Ridpath Maynard, and that very buckeye which he gave her. He lent me the former, and the latter I filched from Grandmother Tredegar's cabinet, when I visited her a few days ago and had this little surprise in mind. Time has shriveled the buckeye as well as the cheeks of the fair recipient, but Time can never rob that buckeye of its sweet associations any more than it can rob Grandmother Tredegar of her sunny disposition and gentle spirit. She hasn't seen this gourd for a good many years. Indeed, I doubt if she knew, before this moment, that it was still in existence. So I am going to pass it to her first."

The old lady took the bone-dry keepsake in her palsied hands. The tears ran freely down her furrowed cheeks at this resurrection of the Past, and for a moment speech failed her. Then she said in a husky voice:

"My dear ones all, I am going to fill this precious little gourd with spring water, the beverage for which it was made, and drink to your health and happiness, not forgetting Ridpath Maynard, whom age and infirmity keep at home. All join me, please. Ridpath married another woman, and I married another man. He loved his wife and I loved my husband; but I don't think I ever had a sweeter kiss than the one he pressed to my wet lips the night he lifted me out of the Black-water."

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The dinner ended, as was customary, with the singing of "My Country, 'tis of Thee." It was too hot for much stirring about, especially on a full stomach. The elderly ladies went to their darkened rooms for a nap. The young people lolled in hammocks and easy chairs, or lay on the grass. Elias and his brother turned toward the garden—a hobby of them both—with their hands clasped behind their backs and cigars in their mouths—a picture, in their duplicate linen suits, of coolness and content.

At the corner of the house they came upon another family dinner. Old Sherman sat at one end of the table, and Cordelia at the other. Between them was almost every gradation of color, from Billy Million's polished ebony to Susie's almost Caucasian fairness. Yet, by social decree, they were all negroes. Christine, Diana, and two or three other young ladies were waiting on the table, reversing the relation of master and servant out of deference to the day.

As Billy Million ate, the sweat stood in great drops upon his brow, and made shining tracks down his cheeks. But his strong white teeth, when not buried in a chicken-leg or roasting-ear, showed in a perpetual smile. Cordelia also had relaxed her dignity to an unusual degree, and her fat breast and shoulders shook almost continuously with laughter, while ever and anon, with an "O Lawd!" she would burst into a long, loud guffaw at some fetching witticism. Old Sherman maintained his accustomed patriarchal gravity, and Susie, still pale and listless, took no part in the merrymaking.

"Brother," observed the senator, as he gazed pity-

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ingly at the beautiful, stricken girl, "that monster Slavery was not killed a day too soon. From it, though born since, came Susie and all the other unfortunates of her kind."

They halted under a mulberry tree near the garden gate. The moist black earth of April was now hard and dry. The tender green of Spring had long since perished. The lettuce, from a lowly cluster of succulent leaves, had become a lusty pyramid. The early onions lifted their flowering heads on high. The parsley was no longer a pretty, deep-green, compact mass, but a tall spindling framework hung with seed-vessels. Yet it was maturity, not senility. The graceful sweet-potato vines stretched away in billowy green ridges. The tomato vines fainted under their load of fruit. Along the wall the peaches were blushing rosier each day under the fervent kisses of the sun.

That night the young people danced on the veranda to the music of three darky fiddlers. There was a full moon, but the shadows of the trees made the Chinese lanterns attached to the pillars very acceptable. It was a pretty scene which Elias and Granville, occupying rustic chairs on the lawn, watched as they smoked. The dancers rhythmically advanced up one side of the veranda, crossed over in front, and receded down the other side. Flushed cheeks, laughing lips, glossy coils of hair and white shoulders flashed into the light of the lanterns and out again, to the witchery of music. That sweetest of all earthly sounds, a woman's laugh, floated out into the night and made the katyids pause in their rasping serenade. Out on the lawn, white dresses

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glowed faintly in the dense bank of gloom; the red disk of a cigar shone, usually, in close proximity. A group of negroes stood at the south end of the veranda watching the festivities, and giving the scene a touch of the picturesque.

As Christine danced with Colfax the fluttering of her heart might have answered several puzzling questions which she had been propounding to herself—Would it be better for her to give up his friendship, in view of her grandfather's prejudice against him? Was she willing to carry that friendship to its logical conclusion? What was its logical conclusion? If it was what her heart had hinted, which way did her path of duty lie? She had noticed that her grandfather had avoided Colfax all day, a thing easy enough to do in that crowd; and she had pluckily set herself to work to offset this neglect. Yet it is not likely that she would have danced with Colfax quite so often, if only for appearance's sake, had she not been anxious to escape the attentions of a Virginia cousin named Brinsley Howard.

Both Howard and Pinckney Singleton had been drinking more or less throughout the day. They had spent the forenoon in horse-racing along the main street of Barnwell, between the court-house and the station. Howard was more than half in love with his cousin, and had bored her more or less ever since dinner with his presence—until Colfax took a hand in the game. As a result, both Pinckney and young Howard gave Colfax some exceedingly black looks whenever they passed him.

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But when you insinuate that I am tipsy, you are passing the bounds of truth."

Something very ugly might have happened had it not been for the timely intervention of Granville Hawley, who led Elias off. Granville had more than an inkling of the complicated relations existing between his brother, Christine, and Norman Colfax; and he had had several conversations with Colfax during the day.

When Christine came to kiss her grandfather good-night, he saw that she had been crying.

"Chris, my girl, I am terribly sorry for what happened to-night," said he, apologetically. "I think, perhaps, that I was hasty."

"Norman was so sorry, too," said she. "He felt that he had not shown the respect due one of your age."

"Well, it isn't the first time he and I have crossed swords. I rather admire the mettle of his blade. Let's call bygones bygones. And I will say that I think the right man measured the floor."

But in spite of his words and his smile, Christine felt that the day, as a whole, had been an unfortunate one for her; and that the success of her invitation to Colfax was very questionable indeed.

## CHAPTER VIII

A CHAIN of events was set in motion that very night, and by a very simple circumstance, which was destined to make Elias Hawley show his hand with regard to Colfax. Judith Hawley, Lyman's eldest daughter, was to spend the night at the Hermitage, with Christine. It was one of those sultry, motionless nights when all the heat that the sun has poured down during the day seems to be sent up again by the earth, taking toll of suffering humanity both ways. It was impossible to sleep; and after making sure that the upper story of the veranda in that quarter of the house was unoccupied by any of the men, Judith, Christine, and the two girls in the adjoining room slipped outside, through the windows, clad in the airiest of costumes.

Judith was a very imp of mischief, daring to recklessness, and her restless mind soon conceived a plan for an interesting and somewhat exciting diversion. Christine, though in no merry-making mood, assented to the plan; and a few minutes later, the girls, dressed somewhat more substantially, were making their way toward the watermelon patch over which black Peter stood guard with a shotgun. Judith, with a sheet under her arm, made a detour of the patch, while the rest of the girls squatted down behind a fence, near Peter's little hut, to watch the fun.

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Some ten minutes later a tremulous, ghostly call floated out on the quiet night air, and the next instant a tall, white apparition crossed the patch in great kangaroo-like leaps. Black Peter, who was dozing in front of his hut, emitted a yell of terror, dropped his gun, and fled for his life. Judith Hawley, panting and convulsed with laughter, came up a moment later and dropped down on the ground beside the girls. Her long black hair was streaming down her back; her strong white teeth gleamed from between her parted lips, and her daring eyes scintillated as if sprinkled with diamond-dust. Altogether, she looked, in her sheet, like some beautiful Egyptian sorceress.

Ghost stories always spread like wild-fire among the negroes, and Chris felt a qualm the next morning when she awoke and found the hand of Estelle her maid on her shoulder.

"Miss Chris, Susie's dyin'!" exclaimed the pretty mulatto, excitedly. "She seen a ghost last night, and it done brought on a hemridge."

Both the girls hastily dressed, hoping fervently that the ghost Susie had seen had no connection with the one they had made, and ran down stairs. Cordelia was getting breakfast in the kitchen, but shaking her head and muttering to herself.

"What's this about Susie, Cordelia?" demanded Christine.

"You go and see for you'seff, Missy," answered Cordelia. "Befo' Gawd, I don't know. When people talks to me about seein' ghostes and angels and all them white and hoverin' things, they's gittin' too thick for

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me. Your grandpaw and Unc' Granville jist gone over."

The girls hastened down the dewy lane to the cabin, and found quite a group gathered there. Occupying a prominent position, close to Susie's bed, was old Vashti, a negro fortune-teller. She was a tall woman, and gaunt as a scarecrow, but now sat huddled in a low chair, with her skinny hands clasped about her razor-like knees, and her chin sunk on her breast, as if in deepest reverie. No one had ever seen her without the red bandana which closely invested her head, and it was popularly believed by the blacks that she had bartered her hair to the devil for certain magical powers. Her eyes, at least, which now burned with a sinister light, were devoid of both lashes and brows; and there was something decidedly uncanny about her, even to white folks' eyes, as she swayed to and fro, shaking her head, and mumbling to herself.

Susie was propped up in bed, gasping for breath and shaking with a nervous chill. As the girls entered, Major Hawley was giving her a drink of brandy. After a little she grew calmer and the Major asked her if she could tell them what had happened.

"Oh, Major Hawley," she whimpered, with a burst of tears, "my time has come! I dreamed last night that the sky was black as midnight, and there wa'n't nothin' to be seen anywhere but a big white post made of marble. While I was lookin' at the post, I seen somethin' up in the black sky, miles away, what looked like a little piece of tissue-paper, turnin' over and over in the wind. It came flutterin' down and down, dippin' this way and

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that, just like a piece of tissue-paper, but gittin' bigger all the time as it come nearer, until at las' it was as big as a sheet—not spread out, but kind of twisted up and loose at the ends. Then—O Gawd!”—she covered her face with her hands and shuddered again—“I seen it was no sheet but an *angel*, with long white clothes a-flutterin' in the wind. It come down and lit on the ground, right beside that post, and writ something on it. I couldn't make out what it was, and while I was strainin' my eyes to see, I woke up. Then, *while I was wide awake*, and sittin' up in bed, I looked out of that winder yander, and seen my husband's face as plain as I see yours. Not natural-like, but like a spirit's; and when I called, he just faded away like the angel did, without a sound.”

“That's no sign you are going to die,” said Granville, encouragingly. “Everybody has dreams of that kind occasionally. If I had allowed such dreams to affect me, especially in the mince-pie season, I should have been dead fifty years ago.”

“But I was wide awake when I seen Elias's face,” insisted Susie, plaintively.

“You thought you were, but you were really in a somnolent or post-somnolent state,” answered Granville, who knew the respect which a polysyllabic word inspires in a negro. “You can see visions in that state just as well as when you are sound asleep.”

When the white visitors left, a few minutes later, with a promise to telephone for Dr. Berry, Sherman hobbled out of the cabin after them.

“Mister Granville, speakin' of them pos'-nolient

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states, I'd like to ax you this—Would that pos'-nolient reach out on the air, like the smell of burnt beans, say, and lay holt of me in t'other room?" His black face, checked with thousands of tiny lines, like weather-worn paint, was full of solicitude, and his ancient eyes blinked solemnly. "Case when I heerd that girl scream, I riz in my bed—jess so—and I looked out of the winder—jess so—and I seen sumpin' flash by in the moonlight—jess so—quicker'n a cotton-tail into a holler log. I seen that, Mister Granville, with my own eyes; but whether it was a sperit or one of them pos'-nolients, I don't know."

"I think you may set it down as a pos'-nolient, Sherman," answered the senator. "From your description, it acted like one; and they're thick about this time of the year, but perfectly harmless. So don't say anything to Susie about it, and get Vashti out of the house as soon as you can."

As the party moved on, Granville added to Elias: "I am inclined to think, brother, that what they both saw was neither a pos'-nolient nor a spirit, but the real Elias Sherman himself."

"The same thought occurred to me," answered the Major. "Yet I hardly believe the black rascal would dare come back."

For three days the sole topic of conversation among the Hermitage blacks was the ghosts which had been seen by black Peter and Susie. Then an event occurred which partially relieved their superstitious fears, but at a heavy cost to others. Billy Million and Zepherine

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had announced their intention of attending a colored dance at Honey Creek. Judith and Chris determined to make the pretty "Zephy" the belle of the ball; and when the vain little piece of black femininity left their hands, after an hour's work, she was indeed gorgeous in the purple silk skirt which hung from her narrow hips, pink waist, green sash—twelve inches wide and trailing nearly to the floor—red neck-ribbon hanging in two long streamers over her spare breast, white gloves, white slippers, and a pair of Christine's open-work stockings, through the meshes of which Zepherine's thin black ankles produced a most startling effect. To give her the last touch of perfection, her kinky hair was erected, after the expenditure of a prodigious number of hair-pins, into a pyramid on top of her head.

To play the game out, Christine wanted to lend the dusky couple her phaeton; but her grandfather set his foot down on this extravagance. "That dance will end in a free fight, as like as not," said he, "and your phaeton come home with the top cut to ribbons. At the very best I look for some of those jealous bucks to take the wheels off Billy's rig and sand the axles." So Billy and Zepherine had to set forth in the old phaeton, behind old gray Dolly. But as they had originally expected to walk the four miles to Honey Creek, they were more than satisfied. With a cigar in his mouth Billy lolled magnificently in the easy depths of the vehicle; and as soon as he was out of sight of the house he placed his gaitered feet on the dash-board with the air of a nabob.

"I hopes, Zephy," said he, between puffs, "that you

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appreciates the importance of them clothes you got on, and won't dance to-night with every common nigger that asts you."

"I fully realizes the importance of my clothes without bein' told," answered Zepherine, stiffly.

This was something of a jar and Billy's cigar glowed fiercely in the dark. Then wrapping the lines about his knee, he drew a flask of whisky from his pocket, tilted his head back, and let the liquor gurggle melodiously down his throat. Zepherine looked on with disapproving eyes.

"If Major Hawley knowed you was totin' liquor, Billy Million, you wouldn't git no more rigs of his'n to drive to Honey Creek. He ain't forgot how that drunken Peter killed a hoss for him."

"What Major Hawley has forgot or ain't forgot, Zephy," said Billy loftily, under the stimulation of his draught, "is a matter of total indif'runce to me."

Neither spoke again for several minutes. It was certainly an inauspicious start. Especially foolish did it seem on Billy's side, for his partner, robed like the Queen of Sheba, would certainly not suffer for want of admirers that night. It was not long, however, before his arm, first laid carelessly along the back of the seat, stole down to Zephy's pink waist. She made no demur. At the same time she showed no disposition to yield to the insinuating pressure of his hand.

"I was jest a-foolin'," said he, in a conciliating tone.

"Fool all you want to," she answered, tartly. "It comes nachal, I reckon."



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"If I was to ast you to marry me, Zephy, what would you say?"

"How do I know till you ast me?"

"Well, I will ast you, then. I ast you now."

"How many other girls you done ast that same question?" said she suspiciously, yet pleased.

"Oh, several," he answered coolly.

"And you ain't married none of 'em yet."

"Nope."

"Then how'm I gwine to know you'll marry me if I say yes?"

"You can't know it. You has to truss me. There can't be no love without truss. Didn't you hear Parson Throckmorton make that same observation las' Sunday?"

"What are you' prospects?" asked Zepherine, with a decided smack of affectation.

"My prospects! Ain't I makin' four dollars a week and bo'd? What more do you want, gal?"

"Slocum Jones is makin' six and some weeks seven."

Billy snorted contemptuously. "And payin' bo'd out of it. But, Miss Mason, if you want to marry a slew-footed, knock-kneed nigger like Sloke Jones for the additional estimation of one or two dollars a week, without calculatin' bo'd, and sayin' nothing about the hoss and buggy at my command, you kin do it."

"I didn't say nothin' about marryin' Sloke," protested Zepherine.

"You absinuated it."

"I didn't absinuate nothin'. I juss said what he

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made. I'd sooner marry you on four dollars a week, Billy Million, than Sloke Jones on ten."

"Would you honest now, honey?" asked Billy, with an expansive smile.

"I suttinly would."

"Then seal the bahgain with a kiss."

She did so. Billy added another seal in the shape of a second draught from his flask, explaining that he was not feeling just up to pitch and needed a slight stimulant.

Honey Creek had an unsavory reputation in Barnwell. Much of the poultry which disappeared between sunset and sunrise was supposed to be traceable to the Creek. Also, portions of family washings left out on the line over night, buggy whips, wood, hammocks, and other portable articles. With the exception of one or two wretched white families, the hamlet was made up of blacks. The adjacent country was a succession of red clay ridges and ravines, with the thinnest possible veneer of soil. No self-respecting white man would or could live upon such land, so that it, too, had been turned over to the sons of Ethiop. In one way or another, not to be inquired into too closely, these dusky sons managed to keep body and soul together. Moreover, with the unfailing spirits of their race, they had their pleasures regularly. Indeed, Honey Creek was famed far and wide among the colored population of Pembroke County for its conviviality.

The building in which the dances were given was an old grist-mill, a monument to the folly and philanthropy of a man named Woods, who hoped by this enter-

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prise to encourage the negroes in raising wheat and corn, and at the same time to make an honest competence for himself. The mill stood just below the hamlet, on the bank of the creek which had furnished it water-power during its brief career of activity. The freshets of many years had undermined the foundations until it was a miracle how the building still stood with only the flimsy propping which the shiftless negroes gave it from time to time. But no thought of catastrophe ever marred the enjoyment of the Honey Creekers; and the bucks and belles thundered over the floor, in their mad cake-walks and breakdowns, as confidently as if it rested on the foundations of the earth itself.

When the couple from the Hermitage drove up to the hitching-rack at the mill, just seven vehicles—including an ox-cart and four saddle horses—had arrived. Dolly had reached the age limit at the Hermitage and was seldom subjected to harness any more; but she looked strong and youthful beside the dozing crow-baits already tied to the rack. The vehicles matched the horses. Incrusted with ancient mud, gray with accumulated dust, broken thills patched with bits of rope and rags, tops hanging in tatters, wheels “dished” and seldom showing a full quota of spokes, dashboards missing as often as not, no whips except hickory gads—they looked like pickings from a junk heap, fitted together for a comic opera stage.

But no reflections of this nature crossed the minds of the newly arrived couple. Nor did the paucity of vehicles dampen their spirits. Vehicles were admittedly

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scarce in the Honey Creek country, and the contemptible collection at the hitching-rack was no gauge of the size of the gathering, for most of the merrymakers walked. Indeed, although it was still early, the noise of revelry already floated from the open windows of the mill.

Billy prudently gathered his whip, lap-robe and buggy cushion under one arm, and led the way forward. After giving up fifty cents at the door to a portly, greasy gentleman whose celluloid cuffs rattled like a dice-box, he escorted his partner into a big low-ceiled room, and coolly deposited his property in a corner, where he could keep more or less of an eye on it throughout the night.

"Would you oblige me, Mr. Million, not to contaminate my lady's nooby with your hoss-blankup?" sarcastically asked a young swell with a sea-green necktie, stepping brusquely forward and rescuing a black and orange nubia. "Was you brung up in a stable?"

"Not in a *cow*-stable," answered Billy, calmly. "I knows the dif'runce between a hoss-blankup and a lap-robe."

At this, Zepherine attested her loyalty to Billy by snickering in Mr. Jones's face—for it was no other than he.

"Better git you' wits sharpened, Slocum Jones, befo' you tries 'em on *my* man," said she. "He'll cyarve you to the bone if you fool with him."

The floor was already well filled with simpering, tee-heeing belles and flashy, guffawing bucks. The

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musicians—two violinists, a bass-violist, and a clarinetist—were already in their places on a platform at one end, tuning their battered instruments with a solemnity befitting gentlemen of their importance. The leader—a tall, round-shouldered man with dirty white gaiters over a pair of immense flat feet—shuffled nervously up and down the platform, snapping his fingers rhythmically to the tune which he hummed through his nose, and swaying from side to side. This gentleman was Cadwallader Hemp, a man with music in his soul; and no one paid the least attention to his grotesque performance, much less thought of laughing at it. The bass-violist was a bald-headed, squat black fellow, with a figure much like his instrument, monstrous lips, cheeks which hung pendent like the jowls of a bull-dog, and fishy eyes—a gentleman bearing an unpleasant resemblance, on the whole, to a gorilla, and whom one would not care to meet alone after dark.

Kerosene lamps, with tin reflectors, were fastened to the walls. Through the murky atmosphere—a combination of lamp-smoke and dust—the feeble flames of the untrimmed wicks shone like distant stars. The carboniferous breath of the burnt oil, added to the closeness of the night and the reek from the perfumed, sweating Africans, produced an effluvium which would have suffocated a white man in fifteen minutes. Moreover, some of the gentlemen were indulging in a quiet smoke, although this was not considered the best of form.

Among the smokers was the bass-violist, who sucked at his cigar-butt behind his great black paws and emitted

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the smoke through his spreading nostrils in short, cautious, almost invisible jets. When the sodden bit of weed went out, as it did constantly, he bent down behind his instrument, struck a noiseless sulphur match on his thigh, and relighted the cigar—and it was only occasionally that the acrid fumes of the sulphur gagged him. Then lifting up again, with the blank, expressionless face of an ape, he would continue his clandestine smoke. The manager of the ball, however, had his eye on Mr. Spate, who was an old offender; and after one of these periodical eclipses of the musician behind his instrument, the manager walked briskly toward the platform.

“Mr. Spate,” said he, in the loud voice of authority, “I must respectfully ax, as manager of this yere ball, that you discontinue for the present any fu’theh use of you’ tobacco. The fumes are exceedingly nauseative to some of the ladies.”

Mr. Spate blinked non-committally for a moment. Then with his horny fingers he pinched the struggling spark from the inch-long remnant of cigar and tucked the malodorous object away in his vest-pocket for future enjoyment.

The Hawley negroes, whose prosperity and easy life were the envy of the impecunious Honey Creekers, were not generally popular at these dances. But Zepherine’s progress around the room to-night was a triumph. Though a full-blood, the physical characteristics of her race—thick lips and flat nose—were not marked in her, and she was really pretty. Moreover, she was amiable. Too amiable, Billy thought sulkily, as from a distance he watched her smile and bow to the admiring gallants

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who flocked about her. The women took no part in this ovation, but out of the tails of their eyes jealously followed the flight of the tropical bird, commenting with an occasional sniff or snort of contempt. But the imperturbable Zepherine, perfectly conscious of the feelings of her less favored sisters, smiled upon them with honeyed sweetness and patronized them in a manner that was maddening.

"Mr. Lawson," said she, meltingly, when she was sure that Mrs. Lawson was listening, "would you be so kind as to tie my slipper? Them silk ties is so provokin'."

"Why, suttinly, Miss Mason, suttinly. The kindness is you's."

Mr. Lawson slid to his knees at the risk of splitting his skin-tight trousers; Zepherine thrust out a small foot in a white slipper, and gave her purple silk skirt a little flirt—just enough to expose something like three inches of open-work stocking over a slender ankle.

"Why, Miss Mason," chuckled the kneeling gallant, "that slipper of you's is done tied all right!"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Zephy, serenely smiling down into his upturned face. "It suttinly did feel loose-like. But thank you juss the same, Mr. Lawson. You' kindness is mos' marked."

Mrs. Lawson's big nostrils curled scornfully.

"Lawd Gawd! Wouldn't that make you *s-i-c-k*!" she burst out to a friend. "I wonder how many more fool men she'll show that skinny laig to to-night."

"Why, Dan Humphreys!" Zephy was saying by

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this time to a handsome young ducky. "You's the last pusson on the face of the uth I expected to see here to-night. How comes it you' roamin' so far from Wild Cat for you' amusements? Ain't you ever goin' settle down? But I'm surely glad to see you."

She extended both her hands with a fine show of comradery, and affected not to see the comely young woman at Mr. Humphreys' side, although she had really noted her well in advance.

"'Tain't the fust time you had both of my hands in yours, is it? Say, Dan," she ran on chummily, leaning daringly close to him and toying with a button on his coat, "will you ever forgit the night when I was visitin' in Wild Cat, and you boosted me up the apple-tree, and——"

"Miss Mason," interrupted Mr. Humphreys uneasily, "let me introduce you to——"

"——and leff me hangin' there like a coon," Zephy continued breezily, "while you shoved the beer under the bench until Aunt Chloe done went by? You was feelin' pretty coltish that night, Dan, and you——"

"Miss Mason," again broke in the gentleman, this time desperately and with drops of sweat upon his brow, "let me introduce you to my *wife*—Mis' Humphreys."

"Your wife!" cried Zephy, just as if she had not heard of his marriage three weeks before. "Dan Humphreys, has you gone and git *married*? La, me! If you ain't the beatinest man! Who'd a thought it! Mis' Humphreys," she added condescendingly, looking now for the first time at the young wife, whose eyes were



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beginning to flash ominously, "I'm glad to make you' acquaintance, and lemme congratulate you. You got a husband who will never tell you a lie, unless," she subjoined playfully, "truth won't suit as well. If he tells you he's a-goin' out at night to attend a meetin' of the trustees of his chu'ch, you'll know he's there—if he ain't somers else, with a pail of beer."

She laughed merrily, threw Dan a knowing look, gathered her rustling skirts about her with the air of a queen, and moved on.

"Dan Humphreys," burst out that gentleman's wife, in a furious undertone, "if you dance with that low-flung hussy to-night, or even speak to her again, you'll go home without *me*. Hear?"

Mr. Humphreys wiped the beady drops from his brow, and humbly promised to give Zepherine a wide berth, then and thereafter.

Quadrilles, polkas and waltzes, interspersed with Virginia reels, followed one another in rapid succession. "Money Musk," "Old Zip Coon," "Leather Breeches," "Old Dan Tucker," "Sugar in the Gourd," and "Cotton-eyed Joe"—these shrilled alternately through the air. But it was not until the "breakdown" that a white spectator would have caught the true spirit of Honey Creek.

By this time the blacks, intoxicated with music and excitement, to speak of nothing stronger, were no longer rational beings. Many were there, unquestionably, whose great-grandfathers, if not grandfathers, had been cannibals in Africa. The wild blood of these jungle forefathers was now coursing fiercely through the veins

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of the children. Their sable faces, streaming with sweat, glistened like the wet oilskins of a sailor. Their eyes flashed and rolled. Shrieks of hysterical feminine laughter rose above the dull roar. Now and then an overwrought woman threw her arms about her partner's neck, or sank in a swoon to the floor. The smoke and dust filled the room like a fog; and the heat of the lamps and the hot bodies of the throng had brought the temperature up to that of a furnace.

As the breakdown progressed and the musicians fiddled harder and harder, an indescribable rhythm took possession of everybody. Hands and feet, arms, legs, and heads moved to music. Up and down and across the room they swung like automatic figures. Not upright or in orderly array, but with twitching features and contorted bodies, pounding the floor with their feet, clapping their hands and slapping their thighs, bending now forward, now backward, bowing and salaaming and revolving, clogging and jigging, moaning and mumbling, faster and faster, until, half-obscured by the murk, the bedlamitish dance looked like some infernal orgy.

When a young woman fell, she was no longer carried out, but left writhing on the floor, with no more care from the wild revelers than a herd of stampeded cattle gives one of its fallen members, except that they did not tread her to death. Madly and more madly played the musicians, weaving back and forth, keeping time with feet and heads, thumping their instruments with their hands, emitting impassioned yelps at intervals, and giving every evidence of going insane. Cadwallader

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Hemp finally leaped from his chair and began to jerk with the music, shuffling, clogging, and jumping like a kangaroo, but all without missing a stroke of the bow.

In the midst of the excitement a voice like the bellow of a bull suddenly swung into the rhythm of the instruments:

“Noah built the ark, an’ he built it on the groun’;  
It took fawty hosses to pull the ark aroun’—  
Keep the ole ark a-movin’, children,  
Keep the ole ark a-movin’ on.  
How long did it run, kin any one tell?  
It run fawty days and fawty nights as well—  
Keep the ole ark a-movin’, children,  
Keep the ole ark a-movin’ on.”

The effect was indescribable. The growling bass of the men and the falsetto of the women immediately caught up the words, and the remaining stanzas were bellowed forth. Pandemonium reigned. Under the thunderous rush of the mob the old mill shook as if struck with a blast; the lamps quivered and flickered and one of them fell crashing to the floor. The bass-violist, now overwrought, flung his instrument down with a maniacal shriek, turned a somersault from the platform to the floor, and plunged into the furious dance.

It was at this point that a tall negro of exceedingly striking appearance stepped into the room. His hair was long and wavy, not kinky, and he had a mustache of marvelous length and beauty. No one knew him; but it was no time for formalities, and he joined the dancers without delay. A most welcome acquisition he proved

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to the mad frolickers. As a dancer, indeed, no one had ever seen his equal. Not a man on the floor was as strong or as active as he, none other could muster his fine frenzy, while his contortions, leapings and bendings were something amazing. In this envied frenzy he swung the ladies dizzily about, tossed them into the air, caught them as they came down, kissed the younger and prettier ones, and, in short, won the admiration of everybody except a few jealous men.

When the fiddles suddenly ceased—the fiddlers having reached the limit of human endurance—and while the revelers, brought suddenly back to earth, still stood like wakened dreamers, gazing vacantly about them or staggering to a seat, the mysterious stranger disappeared as abruptly as he had come. A little later, when the dancers had somewhat recovered, this uncere-  
monious departure excited comment; but it was not until footprints were discovered in the dust under one of the anteroom's windows that positive suspicion was aroused.

Then, one of the gentlemen thrusting his fingers into his vest-pocket, discovered that his timepiece was missing. A second gentleman quickly confessed himself in the same plight, with his pistol and razor gone as well. The treasurer of the society hurried to the money-drawer only to find it broken open and the contents gone. It quickly developed, moreover, that the ladies had been robbed not only of the nectar of their lips—a loss which up to this moment they had borne with admirable philosophy—but also of their stick-pins, brooches and locketts as well. Then, indeed, a cry of rage went up.

## CHAPTER IX

MEANWHILE, the marvelous dancer was making his way across the prairie and through patches of woodland, taking care to avoid the road. A short distance from the mill he had removed a wig and false mustache, and he paused once to make an inventory of his spoils. Aside from this, he moved at a rapid pace and in the direction of the Hermitage. But giving the big, sleeping house a wide berth, he passed on to old Sherman's cabin, softly raised a kitchen window, and crept inside. Opening the cupboard, he ate ravenously of whatever came to hand, including some scraps which had been laid away for the dogs. Then slipping out again, he softly closed the window, and with a bundle under his arm passed up the lane toward the Hermitage.

It was about two o'clock. The grounds lay under the weird red light of a newly risen moon. The trees and outbuildings cast long faint shadows. A fox, stealthily trotting across the lawn, paused under a tree and, rearing himself on his haunches, wistfully extended his slender snout toward the sleeping turkeys on the limb above. Next came a coon, slower and not so graceful. He approached, from inbred caution, by way of the under side of the corn-crib, entered the dooryard, and accidentally upset a pail of scraps. This seemed to

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jar his nerves somewhat, and hearing a low distant rumble he paused suspiciously. The sound came from a through train for New Orleans, on the Central. The rumble rose to a roar; the shriek of a locomotive clove the stillness of the night; and across the prairie a long line of lights leaped into view. Then these lights were snuffed out, gradually but swiftly, by an intervening grove; the roar sank to a rumble again, died away, and all was silent once more. The coon, reassured, leisurely proceeded to nosing about again. But the next instant he made a wild scramble for cover.

A man had stepped out of the shadowy orchard. His feet were swathed in rags until they were the size of a ham, and he walked with a tread so soft that he had surprised even the keen-eared coon. His slouch hat was pulled down over his eyes, and a red handkerchief tied across the lower half of his face.

He crossed the yard and ascended the veranda steps. The great front door stood open, as it did almost every night the summer through; but the screen door was hooked on the inside—a precaution against four-footed rather than two-footed prowlers. Bending his head, the man listened intently for a moment; then, hearing nothing, he deftly slit the wire netting with a knife, slipped his hand through the rent, and unhooked the door. He paused just across the threshold, drew a flask from his pocket, and took a deep draft. From another pocket he drew something which gave off a sinister glow in the faint light, and with this in his hand he disappeared in the interior darkness.

Christine awoke with the feeling of having been

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disturbed. At first she could neither see nor hear anything unusual; but as her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, her heart gave a great bound. Bending over her dressing-table, in a rigid attitude, as if aware of having been detected, was a dark figure. For what seemed an eternity to Chris, in the tumultuous condition of her bosom, nothing happened. Then the figure slowly straightened, and she heard the faint clink of her jewel-case lid.

The next instant Christine leaped to the floor, though with no clear conception of what she was doing, snatched at the robber's hands, and emitted a piercing scream. His right hand rose and fell, noiselessly, but with lightning swiftmess. Christine sank to the floor without a sound. The tall, shadowy figure vanished through the door, and then all was as still as before.

A minute passed, perhaps, before a light shone in the hall below.

"Christine!" came Elias's voice. "Did you call?"

No answer. The light came nearer, up the stairs, and a moment later Major Hawley's huge gowned figure stood in Christine's doorway. At sight of the white heap on the floor he started; but he was not easily alarmed, and thinking that Christine might merely have been walking in her sleep, he stepped within, set his lamp on the dressing-table, and bent over the girl. A little stream of blood trickled down her cheek from somewhere in her hair, above the temple. Taking her limp form in his arms as easily as if she had been a child, he strode to the head of the stairs.

"Mother, mother!" he called loudly.

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Mrs. Hawley appeared at once at the foot of the stairs and he added quickly: "Come up, mother, and bring the hartshorn and a bandage. The child has been walking in her sleep and fallen, or else some fiend of hell has been at work."

He carried the senseless girl back to her bed, and with a groan of commiseration tenderly laid her down. The only guests still tarrying in the house were Captain Maynard and one of Elias's married daughters. The latter, clad in a loose gown, appeared at Christine's door before Mrs. Hawley arrived.

"What is it, father?" she asked in alarm.

"Oh, I don't know, Kate, I don't know!" answered the man, with half a whimper of despair. "Come and look at the baby. Look at this gash in her head. Oh, my God, is my little darling to go in this way!" With a sob—the terrible, heartbreaking sob of an old man—he laid his lips on the girl's cold, pure face.

The next moment Mrs. Hawley, with bottles and bandages, entered the room. Captain Eddy followed, with tumbled hair and trailing suspenders.

"Eddy," said the Major in the tender voice of grief, "go downstairs and telephone for Dr. Berry."

"Wait a moment," interposed Mrs. Hawley with that serenity which few had ever seen ruffled. "It may not be necessary. She may be only in a faint. Hand me a bowl of water, please, Kate."

She gently pressed back the clotted, thick brown hair—an operation from which Elias turned with a shudder, strong man though he was—until she could see the wound.



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"It's deeper than I thought. Perhaps it would be better to have the doctor.

"Go, Eddy," said the Major.

Stooping at the same time to find what was under his heel, he picked up one of Christine's bracelets, and then discovered that her rings, pins and brooches were scattered over the floor.

"This tells the tale!" he exclaimed sternly. "A burglar has been in the house." Clenching his great fists in an agony of rage and grief, he added: "God help him if he falls into my hands!"

Dr. Berry, a little soft-spoken, easy-going man, arrived in about thirty minutes. Major Hawley, now dressed, met him at the head of the stairs. The two old friends clasped hands without a word, Elias indicated Christine's door with a motion of his arm, and the little physician slipped noiselessly in. He did not reappear for nearly half an hour. Then Elias, who had meanwhile been pacing the hall like a caged lion, met him at the door.

"Tell me the truth, Henry," said he.

"She was struck with some blunt instrument—the butt of a revolver, I fancy. The skull does not appear to be fractured. There is always a chance, of course, of a clot forming in a case of this kind, but I don't think we need worry. Her recuperative powers are of the best. She is resting easy now, though still unconscious. I shall remain the rest of the night."

"God bless you for that, Henry!" said the old man fervently. "I feel safer with you here. What can I do?"

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"Nothing. One of the ladies and you and Captain Maynard might just as well go back to bed."

"No bed for me!" exclaimed Elias emphatically. "And I doubt if you could haul either Ruth or Kate there with a log-chain. Tell me, Henry, how can any man, thief though he is, strike down a helpless girl like that? Hell contains no pit hot enough for such a fiend as that. I'll have a posse on his trail by daylight, and if he's in the county we'll run him down by noon. The infamous beast! The fiend incarnate!" he exclaimed, shaking with passion.

"Did he leave any clue?"

"None that we have discovered yet. I have an idea, though, that it is some one familiar with our habits and the house. He got money and valuables from both Captain Eddy and Kate. The rascal even had the effrontery to take my old silver watch from under my pillow—a thing he couldn't pawn for five dollars."

He went downstairs and, ringing up the sleepy girl at the telephone exchange a second time, communicated the facts of the robbery and assault to Burke Keeler the sheriff. At a little after five o'clock, a squad of mounted men rode rapidly up the lane to the Hermitage and began to examine the premises for some clue to the criminal. Christine, of course, could not yet be questioned; and as the rest of the household knew nothing, the rent in the screen door, the rags which the miscreant had worn on his feet, and a few tracks toward the stable formed the slender thread of identification which the posse had to follow.

By seven o'clock the assault was the one topic of

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discussion in Barnwell. A knot of indignant citizens gathered on the bank corner, another on the court-house steps, and a third at the post-office. The Anglo-Saxon passion for justice was at white heat. When Burke Keeler rode his wet, tired horse up to the watering-trough about nine o'clock, and called for more volunteers, fifteen or twenty men tendered their services at once. Some were mounted; others it was thought best to despatch on foot. But whether afoot or on horseback, each man carried a "gun"—rifle, shotgun or revolver—and a forefinger which itched to press the trigger.

The story had naturally lost nothing in its passage from mouth to mouth. It was believed, and not without reason, that Christine lay at the point of death. Once, indeed, the news spread like wildfire that she was dead. Another rumor, more persistent, and exciting equal if not greater horror, had it that the girl's assailant was a negro, and his crime the unspeakable one of his race. More than one man who was usually reckoned as conservative ground his teeth in helpless rage and cursed the day that the Ethiopian was born. Gloomy predictions of a race war were made wherever two men got together. A number of ladies who had planned a picnic in the woods that day, at once gave it up. County Clerk Hayden, standing on a corner, announced to an applicant from the country for a marriage license that there would be no marrying or giving in marriage in Pembroke County that day so far as he was concerned; sterner business was in hand.

About ten o'clock a horse white with lather thun-

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dered into town with a pale, handsome, black-haired girl on its back. It was Judith Hawley. She had spent the night in the country, at her Uncle Nathan Vale's, and the story of the happening at the Hermitage had reached her in its most hideous form. Dashing up to the little building in which her father had his office, she checked her horse on the curb with a suddenness which sent a shower of sparks from his shoes. But no father answered her imperative call. He had gone to the Hermitage several hours before.

"Is it true, Mr. Train, about Christine?" she demanded, shrinkingly, of the nearest man.

"I fear it is, Judy," answered the man gravely.

Without another word she gave the horse a cut with the whip, and went flying down the street in a cloud of dust, toward the Hermitage. Every half-hidden stump in the roadside tangle gave her a start. Many other people had been over the road before her that morning, in addition to the sheriff's parties. Pinckney Singleton had reached the Hermitage by a little after seven. Diana and her Uncle Lyman were only twenty minutes behind him. Next came Lyman's wife with a neighbor. After that there was an almost continuous procession up the grass-grown lane and across the lawn. Even at the comparatively late hour of Judith's wild ride, she passed half a dozen pedestrians and three or four vehicles.

She dropped from her horse without stopping to tie him—half a dozen men stepping forward to take the bridle—mounted the front steps in two or three athletic bounds, and swiftly entered the house. Her

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grandfather stood just inside the door, but she swept by him without a word and with a little whimper threw herself into Diana's arms.

"Oh, Di, is it true?" she cried.

"Is what true?" asked Di, suspecting something amiss.

With quivering lips and blanched cheeks, Judith whispered the dread report.

"Oh, horrible!" escaped Di's lips. "No, no! Not that, thank God! The man struck her on the head with something. She has just told us about it."

"Oh, I am so thankful!" murmured Judith fervently, and gave Di a glad hug. "Can I see her?"

"Dr. Berry won't let any one see her yet. I'm going up now and I'll tell her that you are here."

"Tell Dr. Berry, too, that I'm not going to leave this house until I do see her!" called Judith.

"No rattlebrains admitted!" said her grandfather from behind, drawing her glossy head against his breast.

In the reaction from his grave fears of the early morning, he was almost happy now. "The scoundrel struck her right here," he went on, indicating the corresponding spot on Judith's head with his finger. "It was a miracle that he didn't kill her. When I picked her up the blood was trickling down her cheek, and I give you my word that it looked like a torrent to me."

"Poor Chris!" exclaimed Judith. "It's a wonder she didn't die of fright. Have they got any trace of the burglar yet?"

"Call him murderer," said the old man fiercely.

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"Burglar is too soft a name for such a devil as he. No, no trace yet. I don't expect them to bring him in alive. I don't expect him to surrender without a fight, and if he does fight they'll shoot him down like a dog. But here comes your grandmother, all tired out, and I must look after her."

Mrs. Hawley smiled, kissed Judith, and gave her a little message from Christine. Then she let the man whose clean collar she had buttoned on every morning for over half a century, lead her to a couch in the library, and order her some toast, coffee, and a boiled egg, and otherwise flatter himself that he was indispensable to her existence. But she would not have had him otherwise. There is a helplessness about a man which goes straight to a woman's heart—a helplessness in little things, such as the tying of a cravat or the sewing on of a button. Take that helplessness away from him, and you have robbed his wife, who is also at heart a mother to him, of her sweetest privilege.

Elias threw the study windows wide open. The south wind, laden with the perfume of ripening apples, toyed with the papers on his desk and fingered the white love-locks about his wife's temples. Then lighting his pipe, after Zepherine had brought in the breakfast, he sank into a chair with a sigh of relief.

"Thank God for the little one's restoration!" said he. "Eight hours ago I feared that I should never be happy again."

"And yet God has given you just such examples of His goodness all your life long," said his wife, with her gentle smile.

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"My faith is just as strong as yours, Ruthie girl," said he almost gaily, "but not so quick. It takes more time for it to get on its feet after a knock-down, but after it's up it's planted to stay."

"Did you know that Norman Colfax was one of the sheriff's party this morning?" asked Mrs. Hawley, after a little.

"No, I didn't know it." He took two or three disapproving puffs at his pipe. "It's a little strange that Burke Keeler couldn't make up a posse at four o'clock in the morning without going outside of my friends."

"Don't you consider Norman Colfax as a friend?" asked Mrs. Hawley, with some surprise.

"I do not," answered the old man stiffly.

His wife broke off a piece of toast with her delicate fingers and buttered it anew before speaking.

"I am sorry to hear you say that. I do wish that your faith in Norman's good will toward you were a little stronger."

"It is useless to wish the impossible, Ruth," said he, conclusively. "You might as well wish me to have faith that water will run up hill. I have done my best to think well of that man, but just about the time I succeed in blinding myself to his faults he opens my eyes by some such performance as that on my birthday."

"I thought you exonerated him from any blame for that?"

"I did—in a way."

"I wish you could have faith in him, Elias," she

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continued impressively, after a moment, "because I think I foresee a time when such faith would be of great comfort to you."

"How?" he asked, pricking up his ears.

"I am convinced, Elias, that he loves Christine."

"Well, that's no news to me," he grumbled. "That is a very different thing from Chris's loving him. She knows well my attitude toward him. She knows that he could never enter the family with my consent. I have trusted her, and you needn't fear that she will betray the trust by bestowing her heart in any such quarter."

"Sometimes a girl's heart is bestowed without her consent. Moreover, she might love in a forbidden quarter without any sense of betraying a trust. There is an allegiance in a woman's breast which is higher even than that which she owes to father and mother. 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.'"

"That may be true in the generality of cases, but there are exceptions to all rules. Why do you bring the matter up? Has Christine spoken of it?"

"No, but Diana has. She knows nothing positively, but she suspects just what I suspect. And, Elias, if you are set immovably against that young man; if you can't give up what I can not but regard as a prejudice, I think it is your duty to forbid his ever coming here again, before matters go too far."

"I don't see the use of going to extremes," said he testily. "Chris has a habit of holding herself pretty



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well in hand. Even if she felt any inclination toward Colfax—which you can't make me believe she does—she would never yield to it, out of loyalty to me. She wouldn't yield even if she loved him!" he added, bringing his ponderous hand down upon his knee. "That's the kind of stuff *she's* made of."

"I think that is quite likely, and that is the reason I don't want her to love him if she can't marry him. But, husband, if she, out of loyalty to you, would be willing to deny her heart—a woman's most precious gift from her Creator—what ought you, out of loyalty to her, to be willing to do? Is not a heart a costly thing to sacrifice for a prejudice or an enmity, even though the latter have some basis in truth? Is your enmity dearer to you, do you think, than her love is to her?"

Elias laid down his pipe, which had ceased momentarily to afford him any pleasure, and began to pace the room with his hands in his pockets. Mrs. Hawley finished her breakfast, touched the bell for Zepherine, and then lay back on the couch and closed her eyes.

"What kind of talk is that, wife?" he asked with an irritation which indicated that her shaft had reached its mark. "I dislike Colfax for a good reason; and the very qualities which I dislike in him are the qualities which would make Christine unhappy as his wife. It is for her own good, not my gratification, that I would forbid the banns, if it came to that extreme. But you can't see that, and I suppose no woman could. With a woman, love is all heart, no head. If I thought Colfax would make Chris a good husband; if I thought he was worthy of her love—should she see fit to give

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it—I would step aside with my prejudice, as you choose to call it, and say ‘You have my blessing!’ Yes, though the words choked me, as I verily believe they would. But he *can’t* make her a good husband, and he *isn’t* worthy of her love. Shall I therefore abdicate my sacred office, and let the child throw herself into an abyss of life-long misery? Can she, a child, a mere girl, fathom a man’s character better than I? No! It’s absurd. I shall never withdraw my decree against him; and I’d repeat that if I knew I were to stand before the great Judgment bar to-morrow, as I must in a few years at the most, and meet the girl’s sainted mother, and account for the precious charge she left in my care.”

He drew from his pocket a large cream-colored silk handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Mrs. Hawley, equally touched with emotion, pressed her hands to her face. Beautiful hands they still were, but growing thinner, more fragile, more transparent each year.

“Mother, this is a cross for us both, I know,” said he, taking her hands in his.

“I weep to think that a heart must break whatever the issue—yours, if she does marry him; hers, if she doesn’t.”

“Hers if she *does*, wife,” he corrected tenderly but obstinately. “But aren’t we borrowing trouble? Aren’t we taking a great deal for granted? I know that little girl pretty well, and you may take my word for it that there is nothing serious between her and Norman Colfax. If there was, her old grandfather would have heard of it. He has free access to every nook in her heart.”

## CHAPTER X

ABOUT eleven o'clock Diana, sitting in Christine's room, saw a horseman canter up the lane. She slipped downstairs to meet him at the steps. It was Norman Colfax, but few people would have recognized him in the mask of sweat and grime on his face. He was coated from head to foot with dust; his hands were scratched and bleeding; and his trousers, unprotected by leggings, were shredded to the knee.

"How is she?" were his first words.

"Better—much better—and out of danger. You needn't worry any more. Any trace of the man?"

"None. We have searched every barn, haystack, gully and thicket for four miles to the west. Others have done the same north, south and east. There is only one plan, in my opinion, which offers any hope of catching the fugitive."

"What is that?"

"Bloodhounds—Fisher Wolverton's bloodhounds—and the sooner they are given the trail the better. But you had better not tell your grandfather that I suggested the plan, or it will not find favor in his eyes," he added, with a touch of bitterness.

"Now, Norman, you are unjust," said Di, reproachfully. "Let me prove it by calling him out here!"

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"Do as you please," said Colfax, with an indifferent smile.

With his wife's words still rankling in his mind, Major Hawley, with manifest disrelish, received Diana's announcement that Colfax awaited him outside.

"Can't you talk to him, Di?" he asked.

"I think you had better go yourself," suggested Mrs. Hawley. "Remember his errand."

The old man rose and passed slowly down the hall. He greeted Colfax civilly, even extending his hand, and thanked him for his services. In some eyes—say those which were closed at that moment in an unnatural sleep in an upper chamber—that dusty figure on horseback, with a broad, clotted gash across his cheek, would have looked heroic. But it is not probable that it looked so in Elias Hawley's eyes.

"There is only one objection to your plan, Mr. Colfax," said the Major, after Norman was through. "During the Civil War, when I was jeopardizing my life for my country, that scoundrel Wolverton sat at home here and sewed saddles for rebel cavalrymen, and flourished thereby. I don't like to put a dollar into such a man's pocket, and I wouldn't if there was another brace of bloodhounds within a hundred miles. As it is, I'll have to do it, I suppose, and I thank you for the suggestion."

"Now didn't he behave beautifully!" exclaimed Diana, when the old man had retired.

"He did very well for him," said Colfax, laughing, "though he couldn't resist taking a little shot at me for hiring Wolverton to drive some Republican

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politicians down to Panther Creek once. However," he added playfully, "I can never forget that Elias Hawley is the grandfather of Diana Singleton and Christine Hawley."

He laid his hand on hers, which was resting on his horse's mane. She, whose self-control was usually so perfect, flushed like a school-girl. As he rode off she leaned her head against the brick pillar, with cheeks still hot. A breeze stole around the corner of the house, sweet with the mysterious scents of summer, and kissed her face. She closed her eyes for a moment and yielded, as she did not often yield, to dreams of the Land of Might-have-been. When she lifted her lashes again, they were wet with tears.

She slowly climbed the stairs again. Christine was still sleeping, with a face as white and waxen as a lily. Diana laid the hand which still burned from Colfax's touch against the unconscious cheek, very, very lightly.

"Now the lawful owner has it!" she murmured.

Fisher Wolverton did not arrive with his brace of bloodhounds until the next morning, but he came at daylight. By the time Sheriff Keeler and a dozen deputies—Colfax among them—had arrived, there was a goodly gathering of whites and blacks on the lawn. Wolverton and the two mild-eyed, smallish dogs with the curious wrinkle across their muzzles, were the center of attraction. The man seemed as free from self-consciousness, however, as the dogs, as he sat on the veranda steps and reflectively ejected tobacco-juice at a certain white pebble in the walk.

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"Now, gents," said he, when all was ready, taking a hitch at his trousers, "I want it understood that if one of them dogs breaks his leash and overtakes this cuss we're after, and gits shot, as he most likely would, I'm to be paid for him."

"I suppose that's agreeable to you, Major, ain't it?" asked Keeler.

"Certainly," said Major Hawley, without mentioning his opinion that running down a criminal was the state's affair. "What do you value your dogs at, Wolverton?"

"I've refused a hundred and fifty for the brace. They're lightnin' dogs, and we'll run this devil to cover as sure as there's truth in heaven. *Provided* he ain't took a train or stole a hoss and buggy."

"Or took to water," added Keeler, who wished to imply that he knew something of bloodhounds himself.

"There ain't no water in Southern Illinois that would throw *these* pups offen a scent," said Wolverton proudly. "They'd pick it up where it left the water if it was ten miles away. Now I'll hold the chain for one dog. Who'll take the other?"

Mr. Keeler, who was rather portly, turned to a long-legged deputy who was vigorously chewing gum.

"You take it, Dave. I'll foller with the rest of the boys on hossback."

The rags which the criminal had sloughed off his feet before his flight still lay undisturbed, like polluted things, at the corner of the house. The hounds were given a sniff or two at these, and then they began their marvelous work. Though the trail was nearly

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thirty hours old, and had been trampled by scores of feet, and blown upon all the day before by a fresh south wind, the keen-nosed dogs were not at fault for an instant. Tugging at their leashes and baying loudly, they dragged their keepers along at a double-quick, across the lawn, past the beehives, around a pile of cordwood, and into the orchard.

The excited crowd of spectators streamed along behind, walking, running, jostling, hallooing, and treading on one another's heels. Cordelia's force had deserted the kitchen, and Cordelia herself stood in the door, with her hands under her apron, dubiously shaking her head and prophesying that no hound-pups ever bred would catch the he-devil that had struck Missy Chris down. The lithe Zepherine bounded along on the outskirts of the surging mass like an antelope. No man or boy scaled the orchard fence quicker than she, and if the act rather undecorously betrayed a long thin shank, it was not her intention. Billy Million had some difficulty in keeping up with her, and growled at her curt refusal to receive any assistance in climbing the fence. Even old Sherman hobbled along a little way, but stopped at the orchard.

"Won't this mob bother the dogs?" asked Keeler officiously. He had come a little way to see that the party got a good start.

"Not long," answered Wolverton significantly.

And it did not. The first half-mile lopped off fully one-half the followers, including the sheriff himself; and when the hounds emerged from Major Hawley's forty-acre peach orchard, three-quarters of a mile from the

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house, the party was reduced to a dozen men and boys—and Zepherine.

“You better go back now, Zepher,” said Wolverton, grinding on his quid more cheerfully as the sport began to work in his veins. “Some of these hyere boys might kiss you if they got you out in the woods too fur from your maw. Besides, you ain’t got no hat on, and *I* look fur you to tan.”

Zepherine thrust her tongue out at her tormentor, but accepted his advice. Billy Million, now puffing like a porpoise, was glad of an excuse to remain behind.

“I don’t allow as it will be healthy to be around when they ketch that robber nohow,” he observed, wisely.

“*If* they ketches him,” said Zepherine, skeptically.

The pace set by the impatient dogs through orchard, wood and stubble was a trying one in spite of the drag exerted by the leashmen. The dew still held the dust in check, but the sun was getting high and hot. The tall deputy shifted the chain from one chafed hand to the other, with the sweat dropping from his chin, until finally Norman Colfax charitably volunteered to take his place. But Fisher Wolverton, though twice the deputy’s age and stiff-legged, round-shouldered and hollow-chested, seemed made of iron. The heavy felt hat which he wore winter and summer, regardless of the changing seasons, would have put most men’s brains in a fever within an hour; but scarcely a trace of moisture showed on Wolverton’s peaked face.

Every quarter of a mile some one, with throbbing temples, dropped out of the chase. But the whole



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countryside was aflame with excitement, and constant accessions made good these losses. Every negro cabin contributed a follower or two; farmers left their teams in the fields, and wood-choppers sank their ax into a stump with a whoop and worked no more that day. No woman took Zepherine's place, but more than one housewife ran to the kitchen door as the grim armed throng swept by, and with shaded eyes watched them out of sight, with new conviction in her heart that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Burke Keeler and his mounted escort, including Pinckney Singleton and Major Hawley, followed the general direction of the hunt—by means of highways, lanes and wood-roads when possible, but not scrupling to throw down fence rails if necessary. Wolverton usually had the sheriff's party in sight. Occasionally, where an orchard or a wood intervened, he marked their location only by the cloud of dust which they raised. But he knew that if need for them should arise—which was not likely, considering his own handiness with a gun—a pistol-shot would bring them thundering across the fields. Now and then, where the trail crossed a road or lane, the two parties held a consultation or took a rest.

"You see that ridge," said Fisher, at one of these stops, cutting a liberal slice of tobacco from his plug and pointing ahead with a very dirty forefinger. "If the trail keeps high, on that ridge, it's a white man we're after. If it dips, it's a nigger."

"How do you make that out?" asked Major Hawley, rather skeptically.

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"Because, if he goes down, he's makin' for the crick water. If he makes for water, he's thinkin' of bloodhounds; and if he's thinkin' of bloodhounds, he's a nigger, sure pop."

"Why shouldn't a white man think of bloodhounds?"

"Don't know. Tain't been bred in him, I 'spose."

Within forty rods the trail dipped and, as Fisher had predicted, led straight to the bank of Honey Creek. Indeed, the footprints of the fugitive were to be plainly seen in the mud—a sight which made the hounds bay frantically.

"Nigger," said Wolverton briefly. "A pigeon-toed one, too. He'll need pigeon *wings* to git away from us now."

The dogs leaped belly-deep into the creek and eagerly lapped the water after their hot work. More than one man looked with something like awe from them to the telltale footprints, the first tangible results of the hunt. These sagacious animals were carrying in their memory the scent of those foul rags at the Hermitage, and with their marvelous noses were comparing that scent, at every leap, with the trail. Just once, and for a fraction of a second only, had the flying feet of the fugitive pressed the dust and the grass. Since then dews had fallen, winds blown, and the manifold odors of summer loitered about. Cattle and men and the wild folk of wood and field had crossed and recrossed the trail. Yet the wretched criminal might as well have paid out a cable behind him as he ran, for the subtle essence which he left on the ground was as evi-

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dent to the noses of these dogs as a cable would have been to the eyes and hands of men.

In order to pick up the trail where it left the water, Wolverton took one of the dogs across the creek. A quarter of a mile below, Colfax's hound sounded a bugle call to his mate. There, sure enough, were the foot-prints again, coming up out of the water.

"I'll bet that's the longest time the varmint ever soaked his feet before," observed Wolverton cheerfully. The dogs were working well and he was pleased.

Half an hour later the party reached the hamlet of Honey Creek, and Wolverton expressed the belief that their victim's hour was at hand. But the dogs swept past the hamlet—to the relief, doubtless, of the gathered population—and suddenly mounted the steep bank to Woods's old mill. At the same instant the sheriff's troops came clattering up the road.

"Bust the door open!" commanded Keeler, as the dogs reared themselves against the door and whined.

"But don't let that dog in, Norm," cautioned Wolverton. "He's too good meat for lead."

"You better all look a little out for lead," said Keeler. "Still, I don't believe the fool will shoot."

"If he does, gentlemen," said Major Hawley, instantly, as he dismounted, "I bespeak the post of the first man to enter."

Under tremendous excitement, the door was battered down with a fence-rail. But no shots came forth, nor was any man in sight. But when the hounds had been cautiously let in, they scuttled with rattling nails across the floor to a corner which was littered with

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crumbs, burnt matches, scraps of tobacco, and an empty flask.

"Here he evidently ministered to the inner man, and abandoned himself to Nature's sweet restorer," murmured Jehu Short, who wrote an occasional verse for the *Barnwell Democrat*.

"Meanin' that he et and slept, I s'pose," said Wolverton.

"I'll give him a longer and a sweeter rest than he found here if he comes within pistol-shot," said Pinckney Singleton, with an oath. Yet in spite of his valiance in his cousin's behalf, he was comfortably mounted while Norman Colfax was afoot, bearing the brunt and the heat of the chase. Something like this may have occurred to Major Hawley, who was naturally a just man, for he sharply admonished Pinckney to do no shooting except at command of the officer under whom he was serving.

From the mill the trail led another mile down the valley, crossed a series of ridges, and finally approached Wolverton's own hillside farm. When the hounds passed through the front gate, some jokes were passed at Fisher's expense.

"If I'd 'a' caught him loafin' under my winders, I'd 'a' sent him off with his hindquarters full of bird shot," was Fisher's reply.

They halted long enough for Fisher to broach a jug of liquor in a tin cup. Then the eager dogs, protesting with piteous whines against their detention, and apparently oblivious of the fact that they were at their kennels, were allowed to go on. It soon became

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evident that they were describing a large circle, some five miles in diameter, and doubts began to be expressed of their infallibility. Wolverton reserved his opinion; but when the roof of the Hermitage came into sight again, and the dogs swerved in that direction, even he looked puzzled.

"It's barely possible, boys," said he reluctantly, "that the pups got mixed there at the mill, and lost his *goin'* trail and picked up his *comin'* one. Still, they act as if the trail was gittin' hotter instead of colder."

It required no expert to see this, for the hounds were bugling louder than ever now. Yielding to their spirit—with a good dinner in sight at the Hermitage as well—the posse bounded up the hillside like soldiers in a charge, swarmed over the fence, and crossed the lawn on a run. Past the veranda pressed the dogs, past the kitchen, and straight for the beehives again. Wolverton's face fell. The hounds were starting out on the same old circle again! But at that instant they wheeled sharply to the left, instead of to the right, as before, and baying wildly tore down the lane toward old Sherman's cabin. But instead, of passing it they suddenly swerved into the yard through the rickety gate, knocked down little "Elbridge Hall" Sherman, and threw themselves into the doorway of the cabin.

"This is a nice note, Wolverton!" exclaimed Burke Keeler, in disgust. "After hauling us over half the county, your d—d dogs have got us right back where we started from."

"That may be, and then agin it may not," answered Fisher, placidly. "There's consid'able difference,

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in more respects than one, between this here caving and that brick house yander. Them dogs kim here for a reason."

"I'd like to know what reason," growled the sheriff.

"Because the trail kim here."

"I don't believe it. Your dogs have got switched on to some other nigger's trail—if it is a nigger. Niggers all look alike, and I reckon they all smell alike. Any of you niggers been blackberryin' this morning out toward Wolverton's or Honey Creek?" he demanded of the gaping blacks.

"No, suh," answered several, shrinking from what might prove a dangerous notoriety.

"Them dogs ain't the breed that git switched," observed Wolverton.

This statement was not hard to believe as the bloodhounds, with muzzles pointed heavenward, wailed dismally at their enforced pause, strained toward the cabin door, and turned their great, sad eyes beseechingly upon their master. It was an appeal which went straight to Wolverton's heart, wifeless and childless though he was; and caressing a long silky ear with each hand, he murmured, "You know you're right, boys, don't you?"

"Well, if they're right, what am I to do? Arrest Susie here?" demanded the sheriff ironically, as the mulatto appeared in the doorway.

She presented a ghastly appearance. Her tall, fleshless form—a mere rack of bones for her clothing—tottered from weakness. The clawlike hands with which she stayed herself against the jamb of the door, the

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corded neck, knifelike jaw, and the hollow eyes which she turned upon the dogs in an ecstasy of terror—these were all marked by Death. Yet she spoke firmly.

“I heerd what you said, Fisher Wolverton, and you’ dogs *is* right; for while I laid on my bed before sun-up this mawnin’, somebody come up softly to this do’, tip-toein’ easylike, and makin’ no mo’ noise than a cat. Then they tiptoed aroun’ to that south winder yander, and I slipped out of bed and seen a man lookin’ in. He stood there a minute, ponderin’ like, it seemed to me, and then he sneaked away, across the lane, and went down through the woods.”

Wolverton was skeptical of this story, but at Major Hawley’s suggestion he led the dogs to the window indicated. Sure enough, they immediately picked up the trail again, crossed the lane, and loped down a gentle descent through the wood to the banks of the Little Bluestone.

“Susie was right,” admitted Wolverton. “No human bein’ could fool these dogs. The cuss has took to water agin.”

He was about to ford the stream with one of the dogs, as before, when Jackson, the tall deputy, shouted excitedly:

“Hold on! There’s a body in the crick!”

Amid intense excitement the posse crowded up to the bank of the pool. In the center, where the water was perhaps two feet deep, lay a dark, uncanny object of the size and shape of a man; and what was plainly a pair of coat-tails rose and fell in the current with a slow, sinister motion. It was not only the superstitious

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blacks who drew back from the bank with solemn faces, but many of the whites as well.

"Somebody go and git a rake or somethin'!" bawled out the sheriff.

"No need of that," said Colfax, and leaped into the water above his knees. As he groped beneath the surface for a hold on the forbidding object, Major Hawley, with vengeance no longer burning in his eyes, looked on with a subdued face. Then straightening up, Colfax lifted from the water—not a body, but a streaming coat weighted with a stone the size of a man's head.

"Well, does it bear on our case?" asked Keeler, after everybody had examined the garment.

"The dogs don't pay no attention to it," said Fisher, astutely. "But water would kill the scent, of course. There's one curus thing about that there coat, gents, which none of you may have happened to notice. It ain't been in that crick many hours. There ain't a grain of sand or mud in the pockets."

A perplexed silence fell. Then came a shrill, anxious little voice from a safe distance:

"You better put it back, mister! If you don't the hants will git you, and you'll have to wash you' hands in the blood of a black cat to git the pizen offen 'em."

"Tell us more about that, my boy," said Colfax to the little darky, after an admonitory word in an undertone to the Major and the sheriff. "Nobody will hurt you."

"I dassent."



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"Yes, you do. I've got a buckeye here that will take any spell away, if you need it." When the child still hesitated, Colfax held up a quarter. "Speak up and the money is yours."

"I seen Mis' Sherman draggin' that coat thoo the woods with a string, early this mawnin', when I started blackberryin'; and she said she didn't dast touch it with her hands because a hant had breathed on it and pizend it; and she said that the hant would git me if I tole anybody."

For a moment the significance of this intelligence broke on no one; then Colfax said gravely, with a glance at Major Hawley:

"I think we had better go back to the cabin."

As the posse swarmed over and through old Sherman's fence, trampling his petunias under foot, Major Hawley raised his riding-whip to halt the proceedings.

"Gentlemen, I have neither the right nor the desire to interfere, but I cannot help feeling that we have made a mistake somewhere. There is surely no one in this cabin who could have committed the crime, but there is a very sick woman here whom a little excitement might easily kill."

No one moved for a moment. Then Zepherine, with glistening, frightened eyes, approached the Major. The crowd was as silent as a group about a grave.

"Major Hawley, I don't know as it's got anything to do with the houn's," she began in a trembling voice, "but my Uncle Elias was to the dance at Honey Creek the other night, with a false mustache on. I knowed him because I felt his crooked front finger when I

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danced with him; and when I heard that them houn's went to the mill, I——"

She got no further. At sight of Susie's appalling eyes, Zepherine's tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth. But she had gone far enough. Scarcely a man in the posse but remembered the fight in which Elias Hawley Sherman had broken his left forefinger two years before.

Major Hawley, with a vast pity on his fine old face, turned to the trembling mulatto in the door.

"Susie, you have never told me a lie yet. Is Elias here?"

"Major Hawley," she cried shrilly, "I never told you a lie yet and I never will. *He is not here!* Don't, don't for God's sake, let them bloodhoun's come in! They'll scare me to death if they do."

She reeled backward, away from the Major's extended arms, and fell her full length upon the floor with a sickening sound. When the Major lifted her to a cot, a crimson flow was staining her lips.

"Carry her to the house, some one!" he commanded. "Dr. Berry is there now. There's ugly work to be done here, I fear." As the bearers of the cot passed out, he added to Burke Keeler: "Order your posse to surround the cabin, Burke."

"Tain't necessary," said Wolverton, smiling. "He's whar he can't git out."

Following the man's complacent glance, Major Hawley saw that both the bloodhounds had reared themselves against the ladder leading to the loft of the cabin.

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"Is he up there, do you think?" asked Elias.

"He's up there—sartin sure."

For a moment no one spoke. Brave men were not lacking in that silent group, but none of them cared to beard the powerful and desperate negro in his pitch-dark den above. Then Major Hawley threw back his head and called in stentorian tones:

"Elias, come down and surrender to the officers of the law! I pledge you my word you shall have justice. If you give no sign of your presence up there within sixty seconds, we shall riddle the ceiling with balls, and your blood will be upon your own head!"

For thirty seconds, perhaps, as Major Hawley stood with his watch in one hand and his revolver in the other, there was no sound except the low, plaintive whimpering of the dogs. Then came a slight noise from overhead—a noise like falling plaster under the feet of a scurrying rat. Next, the trap-door at the top of the ladder moved, an inch at a time, and slowly lifted. A pair of big, black bare feet appeared, followed by a pair of long legs in tattered trousers; next a muscular body, and finally the face of Elias Hawley Sherman. He dropped to the floor with the grace of an athlete, folded his arms over his perfect chest, and confronted his captors with a half smile on his comely face.

The bloodhounds, hitherto as docile as rabbits, now struggled furiously to get at the object of their long search. But Wolverton, with a bony hand through the collar of each, restrained them a moment longer.

"'Lias," said he, "these is the boys that run you to your hole. I don't reckon you keer to thank 'em,

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but I'm goin' to turn 'em loose on you, just to satisfy their cur'osity and as a kind of reward. They won't hurt you, and I don't want you to hurt them."

He released the straining dogs and they instantly sprang upon the stalwart negro. Some of the spectators gasped, in spite of Wolverton's assurance; but Elias Sherman did not flinch or unfold his arms. The hounds, instead of rending him limb from limb, merely sniffed at his clothes and licked his hands, in a joyous, exultant way, as if to satisfy themselves that this man was really the object they had followed so far, and that they had fairly won the game. Then they quietly retired to a corner and lay down. Vengeance was not theirs. To find, not to destroy, the creature who had left his scent upon those rags was their sole object. This done, he possessed no further interest for them.

A cane thumped upon the doorstep and old Sherman, bent and warped with age and disease, hobbled into the room. He looked at his graceless son long and steadily out of his blurred, failing eyes, but no word passed his lips.

"This is a sad day for your father and for me, Elias," began Major Hawley with emotion. "What has brought you to such a pass as this? How could you, who have received so many favors from my hands, enter my house to rob me? Don't you know that if you were hungry, I should have fed you; or given you clothes, if naked? Above all, how could you strike down, with a murderous blow, that helpless innocent girl who never spoke a harsh word to you in her life—whom you used to carry about in your arms when she

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was a little tot? How, Elias Sherman, after you had once felt those little baby hands against your cheek, could you raise *your* great strong hand, armed with a deadly weapon, and strike her down in a senseless heap—in death, for all you knew?”

A painful silence followed this terrible arraignment. The half smile died from the negro's face; but he was still perfect master of himself, and he looked his accuser squarely, though not impudently, in the eye.

“Major Hawley, I didn't know it was Christine.”

“*Miss* Christine, you spawn of hell!” burst out old Sherman, in uncontrollable fury. “Whar's the manners I taught you in you' childhood, you ondutiful son? Whar's you' gratitude, whar's you' manhood? Gone, gone, gone! You run away and leave you' sick wife to charity; and when you come back, you come to rob the bes' frien' you ever had on the face of the uth, and the bes' frien' that you' daddy ever had, and to eenamost kill the poor lil girl that never hurt a fly in her life. There she's a layin' in that big house”—pointing with his wavering stick toward the Hermitage—“like a big wax doll, as white and still as a cawpse, with her eyes shet and her lil hands folded—her lil hands”—his voice grew husky and broke for a moment—“that used to stick the cloverheads in you' hair, and tickle you' neck till you make her laff and crow right out to herseff. Is you turned devil? Speak! And if you' own tongue is silent, let the devil in you speak.”

“Tain't no use to speak,” answered the son, sullenly. “What's done cayn't be undone.”

The sheriff stepped forward and handcuffed his

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prisoner. Wolverton called to his dogs, and the party filed out of the cabin. Major Hawley lingered with old Jubilee, speaking such words of comfort as he could. At last he, too, left, and the ancient negro hobbled to the shady side of his cabin, and sat down on a bench in the angle of the chimney, muttering to himself, shaking his head, and dropping scraps of Holy Writ.

A ragged-winged turkey buzzard soared lazily in the hot blue overhead. From the stubble came the metallic click of the grasshopper. A crow called from afar. A colt whinnied. Some one in the hazy distance was singing. A tufted titmouse monotonously piped from an elm. A house wren, scolding saucily, darted from a knot-hole in the eaves, lit on a sunflower stalk, and let out of his beak an eager, tumultuous flood of song which made his tiny body quiver. Then, ceasing as abruptly, he disappeared among the tomato-vines to forage for his clamorous family of seven.

Old Sherman was asleep!

## CHAPTER XI

CIRCUIT COURT opened the day of Elias Sherman's capture. Lawyers, litigants, witnesses and jurors had gathered from the neighboring towns and country, filling the Lincoln House, enlivening the quiet streets, and making business for barber-shops and saloons. Judge Hubbard, a lifelong friend of the Hawleys, had sat on the hotel veranda the evening before, smoking and listening to the story of Christine's assault from the lips of the garrulous landlord.

The first case on the calendar was Pett Dogan's. It was a case of picturesque and even romantic interest. Dogan was a Panther "Cricker," as the denizens of Panther Creek were commonly called. All Panther "Crickers" were more or less tough, but it was a proverb that the further up the creek they lived the tougher they got; and Dogan proudly boasted that the stream *rose* in his wood lot. Half a mile from Dogan's cabin lived a man named "Snake" Bannister. Snake claimed that the creek really rose in *his* wood lot, and that Pett's stream was only a tributary of Panther. Whether this was true or not, Snake was undoubtedly entitled to a residence very close to the source of the creek.

The feud between these two quarrelsome men may well have begun in this trivial contention; but most

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Panther Creekers, and perhaps the principals themselves, have now forgotten just how it did begin. Like a fire in a peat-bog, it had smoldered for years, with periodical outbreaks, dividing Panther Creek into two hostile camps and furnishing a regular supply of grist for the mills of justice.

Pett and two cronies of his were now charged with having abducted old man Bannister's daughter Cleopatra and carrying her off to a cave. It was generally believed, however, that Pett and Cleo were in love, and that the abduction was only a ruse to blind paternal eyes; for had Cleo openly married Pett, Snake would certainly have killed her. The customary burnings and shootings had followed the abduction, though fortunately without loss of life on either side; and Snake, getting the worst of the fight, had finally appealed to the law—a cowardly act in the eyes of many of his own partizans even.

At sunrise on the day of the trial, a motley horde came up out of the south on the Cairo road, and filed into Barnwell—in much the same manner, one may fancy, as the barbaric Goths filed into cultured Rome. Tall, sallow, long-haired men, silent and mirthless, with long muzzle-loading rifles in their hands; slatternly, flat-breasted women, with wisps of clay-colored hair twisted into an insignificant knot at the back of their heads; hungry, dejected-looking hounds; horses with protruding hips and shoulders and fleshless ribs—such were the followers of Pett Dogan and Snake Bannister, afoot, on horseback, in ox-carts and wagons.

The circuitous ways of the law were not unknown to



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these backwoodsmen, and they had come prepared to see their respective chieftains through, no matter what the delay. Piled in the wagons with the women and the children, were liberal stores of provender for man and beast, bedding, pots and pans, and here and there a rusty sheet-iron stove. Chicken-coops and bundles of hay were roped to the tail-gates; buckets and lanterns swung from the axles below. Over all, blending one color with another, lay the ubiquitous dust.

In the court-room the whole forenoon was occupied with legal preliminaries. The Panther Creek boys, finding little entertainment in this, speedily repaired to the saloons. By noon most of them had reached a stage of intoxication where they itched to show their valor. Now Panther Creek hated a negro, in several and in general, in season and out of season, and allowed him not within her precincts. The story of the assault upon Christine Hawley, which they heard in exaggerated form, was received with loud indignation, curses, and chivalric threats; and when Burke Keeler and his posse rode into town, with the manacled negro in their center, the situation was ripe for trouble.

By quick work and the use of back streets, the prisoner was safely lodged in jail; but as the afternoon wore on the prospect for the night was far from reassuring. Doganites and Bannisterites, patching up a brief truce, staggered about the streets arm in arm, flourishing their guns and occasionally discharging them in the air, emitting maudlin yells, cursing the sons of Ethiop at the top of their voices, and even terrorizing the bartenders into handing them out free drinks.

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No woman in Barnwell ventured across her threshold that night, and few men went down town after supper. Most of the stores were closed; and the arc-lights, which had not been running for a month owing to a shortage of water, were turned on at sunset by order of Mayor Osgood.

Colfax sat in his unlighted office above the turbulent street, with a cigar in his mouth, his feet on the window-sill, and a pistol in each hip pocket. The anger which at first had burned in him against the brutal assailant of one so dear to him, had given way to a higher emotion—the preservation of order and the upholding of the law. He had advised Keeler to make no arrests unless it became imperative, for nothing would so quickly precipitate a riot. But a large number of deputies, of whom Colfax himself was one, had been sworn in; and at this moment a dozen or more determined men were guarding Elias Sherman over at the court-house, in the grand jury room, which was regarded as a safer place for his detention than the jail.

Colfax's telephone rang—loudly and insistently, it seemed, in the stillness and darkness of the room. The speaker was Estelle, at the Hermitage, and she stated that her mistress would like him to come out at once, if possible. With a quickened heart at the unusual summons, Colfax locked his office, shifted one of his pistols to a side pocket, where it could be had more quickly, and descended the stairs. He made his way along Main street for two blocks, without molestation, and then turned into a dark side street, where his saddle-horse stood ready for any emergency.

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Major Hawley, aware of the state of affairs in town, had warned the negroes not to leave the place that night. Nevertheless, some of them, unable to curb their curiosity, had gone to town. They had speedily, very speedily returned, bringing to Sherman's cabin a most lurid account of the orgies in Barnwell and the threatened lynching of Elias. Old Sherman, blinking purblindly, with his crossed hands on his stick, heard them through; then clapping on his hat, he started for the house.

He found Major Hawley sitting on the veranda, near his study window. Christine had been carried downstairs, where it was cooler, and now reclined in an easy chair just inside the window. Old Sherman's shuffling feet, moving with unwonted haste, roused her from a doze.

"Marster, they's gwine to lynch my boy befo' mawnin'!" cried the old man shrilly. "He's bad, marster. He struck the lil girl down. But don't let 'em hang him, marster, don't let 'em hang him! He don't deserve that, and he ain't fitten to die!"

Christine's heart gave a great leap. It seemed an age before her grandfather answered calmly:

"Jubilee, your boy shall not be hurt. You have my word for it. I'll go to town at once. You go and tell Billy to saddle my horse."

"I'm going to town, pet," said he to Chris, entering the room through the window and going over to his desk, where he began to fumble in a drawer. "It will ease the old man. You heard what he said about Elias. I don't think there's any danger, but I should

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like to know just what the situation is before I go to bed. Have you seen my briar pipe? It's plaguery dark in this drawer."

"Grandfather, you are after your pistol!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, I am," he confessed, slipping the huge revolver into his pocket. "I have no idea that I shall have any use for it, but the Panther Creek boys are in town, and I like to be prepared. Not a word to your grandmother. She's foolish about pistols, while you are not." With which bit of flattery, he kissed her good-by.

But Christine, in her nervous condition, was a prey to the most horrible imaginings; and feeling that she must do something or go mad, it was then that she had instructed Estelle to telephone for Colfax, whose prominent part in the man-hunt had been related to her. Colfax and Major Hawley met on the road. In the darkness Colfax himself passed unrecognized, but he knew at once the herculean form, military bearing, and white hair of Major Hawley. He wondered if there was any connection between the latter's absence from the Hermitage and his own summons.

Mrs. Hawley answered Colfax's ring; and after thanking him for his arduous services of that and the previous day, she led the way to the library and left the two young people alone. A shaded lamp now burned in the room. Christine wore a pretty flowered gown, loose and thin, from beneath which, resting on a cushion, peeped a pair of pink slippers. The bandage over her wound, so far from marring her beauty, sat

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on her thick brown hair like a fillet, and lent her a piquant charm.

But the rose flush on her cheeks, which all day had been cold and pale, and the liquid shine of her eyes, were what Colfax saw first and last. They fired him—in an instant, and without warning—with such a passion for her as he had never felt before. In her careless and informal costume—not so careless, perhaps, as he imagined—she seemed a surpassingly sweet and beautiful object. He yearned to possess her—eyes, brown hair, scarlet lips, snowy neck and all; but it was for her pure heart that he hungered most, and the splendid love with which it would some day invest some man. Was that man he?

“Oh, Norman, are they going to hang Elias?” she asked at once.

“Not if the citizens of Barnwell can prevent it,” he answered decisively. “And we think we can.”

“But those terrible men from Panther Creek! Grandfather says they are all drunk. And old Sherman was just over here, frightened nearly to death. Some of his boys had just got back from town, and they were sure that Elias would be lynched before morning. Don’t let such a terrible thing happen, Norman,” she ran on excitedly. “I should feel as though Elias’s blood were on my head. It may be, as he says, that he didn’t know it was I he was striking down. He may not have even known that it was a woman. He used to be so good to me, and as I sat here in the dark I could picture him swinging from a telephone pole, or, worse still, tied to a stake. I don’t know how the men feel toward

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him, but their crime will be greater than his if they let those lawless Panther Creekers wreak their hatred of the black man on him."

"Now, Chris, there is no use in getting the least excited," answered Colfax, authoritatively. "Twenty men, armed to the teeth, are guarding Elias in the court-house, and there are a dozen more of us hidden around on the outside, to report any movement. I give you my word that nothing shall happen to Elias. Had you died, Chris, I am free to confess that we might have disputed the privilege of hanging him with the Panther Creekers. But as it is we are all so happy over your recovery that we shall strain every nerve to see that even the author of your sufferings gets strict justice. And need I tell you, Chris, that I am the happiest of them all?"

The flush deepened on Christine's cheek. "I knew you would be," she answered simply.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to take her hand, for he was still standing beside her chair. Then, scarcely aware of what he was doing, he dropped one knee upon her footstool, bringing his face level with hers. Her warm eyes shone with a puzzling, opalescent sheen, but they seemed determined not to admit the significance of his act.

"Suppose grandmother should open that door," said she, quietly.

"She would close it again. Chris, can't we have an understanding?"

"I supposed, after our talk of the other day, that we had had one."

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"Did you, honestly, woman to man?"

Her lashes drooped until they seemed to rest on the white skin beneath. Her breath, slightly hurried, stirred the lace on her breast; and the breast itself rose and fell, a little quicker than before. Colfax was so close that a faint perfume stole into his nostrils. It was not violet, or white rose, or crab apple blossoms—it was just Her, and sweeter than all the others. At the same time a little tongue of flame was creeping up her cheek, toward her temple.

"Why—I—what do you mean—exactly?"

"Just what I say. Do you feel that we have had a real understanding? Are you willing for our affairs to drift on indefinitely, in their present state?"

"What do you mean by drifting?" Her voice was scarcely audible, and both apparently had forgot that he still held her hand.

"Don't you know what I mean? There has been a bond between us, strive as we may, for reasons of expediency, to ignore it. I want to know if that bond is love, on your part. You know that that is what it is on mine. And if it is love, I want to know if you will marry me?"

"Have I ever given you reason to believe that I loved you?" she asked, without lifting her eyes.

"Not to believe it, Chris, but to hope it."

She raised the dusky curtains of her eyes, in an attempt to look into his; but dropped them instantly again.

"Do you believe it?" she asked, faintly.

"That you love me?"

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She nodded her head.

"Chris, I do."

She did not speak at once, but a light overspread her face which thrilled him as no words could have done. Then she lifted her lustrous eyes, unflinchingly, in spite of their tears.

"Do you remember what I said about grandfather and his feelings toward you?"

"Yes."

"I told you, on his birthday, that he felt more kindly toward you. But I know now that he does not—that he will never permit me to marry you."

"Then marry me without his permission. I will stand upon my rights and ignore his wishes in the matter. Will you do as much—in justice to me?"

She began to sob. His tempestuous attack had swept her off her feet. Her head sank lower and a moment later lay upon Colfax's shoulder. She shut her eyes and surrendered her trembling lips to his. He was conscious only of the gossamer touch of her hair upon his temple, her warm breath upon his cheek, and the wild beating of her heart imprisoned there between his arms.

"Poor, dear old grandpa!" she murmured, quivering. "I shall break his heart. Tell me, have I done wrong, dear?"

"I cannot believe it. I think it is the first time you have really done right—if you love me."

Her hand suddenly closed tightly around his fingers—answer enough for any lover.

"And will you make it easy for him, dear—and help me to do so?"



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“With all my heart.”

“And you—you will wait a little while before you tell him?”

“As long as you choose.”

They were silent for a little while; then gently releasing herself she said: “Now you must go back. Duty calls. But promise me that you won’t incur any needless risk.”

“I promise.”

“And you won’t let them hurt Elias?”

“No.”

“Then kiss me!”

He kissed her, first on mouth and eyes, and then laid his lips on the bandage, just over her wound. “To make it well,” he said, smiling.

“Foolish boy!” she murmured.

But a beautiful radiance shone from her eyes at his foolishness.

## CHAPTER XII

WHEN Colfax reached town again, the streets were ominously quiet. The court-house square was apparently deserted, the only living thing in sight being Major Hawley's black saddle-horse at the hitching-rack. The glare of the arc-lights would have made it almost impossible for a rabbit to approach the court-house unseen.

But just as Colfax crossed the street, instantaneous darkness, like the snapping of an optic nerve, engulfed him. At the same moment stealthy footfalls reached his ears; and as soon as his eyes had adjusted themselves to the gloom, he made out a number of dark forms gliding across the street into the shadows of the court-house yard. With no attempt at concealment, but with a creepy feeling in the neighborhood of his spine, Colfax passed up the graveled walk to the front entrance of the building, and ascended the steps. The doors were locked; but at the sound of his voice a barricade within was removed, one of the doors was cautiously opened a few inches, and a dark-lantern was flashed in his face. Then the gleaming pistol back of it was lowered, and he was bidden to enter.

"What put those lights out, Norman?" demanded Mayor Osgood.

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"The mob, I suppose. Are the incandescents out, too?" he asked, glancing at the lantern in the mayor's hand and the gloomy corridor beyond.

"Everything's out, and I can't get anybody over the telephone," fretted Osgood.

"Then you may be sure the Panther Creek boys have cut the wires," said Colfax.

Leaving the guard at the door, he and the mayor passed on to the grand-jury room. The sheriff, in a far from amiable mood, was just lighting a grimy, cobwebby lamp which he had dug out of a closet by the light of a match. The feeble glow which struggled through the dusty chimney, rendered dimly visible a dozen men, including the prisoner, a stove, table, and ancient desk. Most of the men squatted on the floor, with their backs to the wall. They seemed to be divided into two camps, as many a jury, in the years gone by, had been divided in this same room. But the reason for such a division was not obvious to Colfax until some one seized him by the coat-tail and drew him out of range of the window.

"Are you hankerin' for a ball out of one of them squirrel guns?" inquired the rescuer, cheerfully.

"It looks like a cussed shame, Elias," observed Mr. Keeler to the prisoner, as he wiped his oily hands on his trousers and spat resoundingly in a corner, "for fifteen or twenty good men to be riskin' their lives to save your wuthless hide."

Major Hawley was one of the few who occupied chairs, disdaining to squat out of possible rifle range. His fine old face was full of trouble, for he felt a

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measure of responsibility for his black namesake, just as he did for all the negroes on his place. At the same time he did not permit the sheriff's remark to pass unchallenged.

"It is not to save his life, Burke, but the majesty of the law, that we have assembled here."

The prisoner, with manacled hands, also occupied a chair, although he had been given his choice between that and the floor. Before he had begun his downward career, he had been a general favorite in Barnwell on account of his great strength, courage, and good nature; and it was probable that most of his guards felt only pity for him. Certainly Keeler did, in spite of his former caustic remark, when he beckoned Major Hawley from the room.

"If things get hot here, Major, ought I to unclamp Elias and give him a chance for his life?"

"You will have to determine that for yourself, Burke. As for me—and I have been injured more than any one else by him—I would ten thousand times sooner see him go scot free than dangling from a pole, which will be his fate if those drunken devils get hold of him."

"My sentiments exactly. We won't say anything about it, though, in there. People sometimes differ as to ways and means; and if I *should* turn up without him, after a fight, tain't necessary for everybody to know how it happened."

When a plan of action was discussed, it was suggested that the sheriff make an appeal to the rioters from the front steps. Whatever attributes Burke

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lacked, courage was not among them, and he readily assented to the plan. To minimize the risk, however, by making his identity clear, a lantern was first set out on the stone balustrade of the portico. But the hardy volunteer for this service had scarcely turned his back before a rifle ball smashed the globe into a thousand pieces and snuffed out the flame. With an oath, Keeler seized another lantern and stepped boldly outside.

"Citizens of Pembroke County," he called in a loud voice, "I command you in the name of the law to return peaceably to your homes, or your present habitations, and desist from this disorderly conduct. I have twenty armed men with me, every one of whom are willing to shed their blood in upholding the majesty of the law. You've got no more show of getting our prisoner than you have of standing this court-house on end. So, again, I command you to disperse, and thus save yourselves future trouble." He ceased. A second rifle flashed in the gloom before him, the lantern winked out, and there was a tinkle of glass around his feet. He stood undecided for a moment, and then re-entered the building.

He there discovered that the ball which had shattered his lantern-globe had gone on through a panel of the door and embedded itself in the wall beyond. Incidentally, the wind from it, in passing, had ruffled Tom Osgood's hair; and that honorable magistrate, having retired a safe distance from the door, was still passing his hand over the back of his head, as if yet unconvinced of the entirety of that organ. Burke grinned.

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"It often happens that bouquets thrown to an actor are picked up by the wrong party," said he.

"This begins to look serious, gentlemen," observed Major Hawley, glancing at his big, open-faced silver watch—returned by Elias Sherman after his capture. "I should like to stay here and see you through, but I told Christine that I would be right back; and if I don't get there neither she nor Mrs. Hawley will close her eyes to-night. If I could telephone, I'd remain."

"*Can* you go now, Major?" asked Simeon Wilcox, leaning on his rifle. "Them boys may pop you."

"I shall try it," answered Elias, fearlessly.

"They'll let him out, I guess, but I wouldn't warrant that they'd let him back in again," said Keeler. "Tell that little girl of your'n, Major, that there's one of my guards who sha'n't be hurt to-night."

He glanced facetiously at Colfax, and a smile passed round—the smile that will doubtless always pass round, till Time is no more, when Love is the theme. Major Hawley turned and fixed upon Colfax those penetrating gray eyes which had never yet quailed before any man. Colfax met the glance squarely. It was as if a challenge had been given and accepted.

The door opened. The Major, twitching his hat over his eyes, as if to meet a blast, stepped out on the portico. The besiegers had evidently reconsidered their shooting out of the lanterns, for two of their own now sat near the foot of the steps. The Major's giant form presented a tempting target in their yellow flare, but

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he passed down the walk unchallenged, and disappeared in the darkness beyond.

Meanwhile, Colfax had drawn Keeler aside and proposed a plan of relief.

"It's a first-rate scheme, Norm," admitted the sheriff. "But it's too risky fur you. I can't let you take the risk—after my promise to the Major," he added facetiously.

"It's not as risky as keeping Elias here," argued Colfax. "If we do that, there'll be bloodshed sure."

"Mebbe we can sneak him out of the back door."

To test this, the two men repaired to the rear door, which, of course, was also guarded. Keeler, in a whisper, ordered the lantern extinguished; the bolts were noiselessly drawn, and he stepped out on the balcony. He was not long in doubt as to the impracticability of smuggling his prisoner out this way, for the click of half a dozen rifles instantly came up out of the darkness below. It was a hair-raising sound, and the sheriff lost no time in stepping inside again.

"I guess we'd better try your plan, Norm," he observed.

Two minutes later Colfax descended the front steps, with no attempt at concealment or haste. The same ominous click of cocked rifle hammers saluted his ears, and he prudently halted.

"Go on!" commanded a voice. "But no more comes out or goes in."

"I am going for a doctor," answered Colfax. "You certainly can't object to our saving a man's life, if possible."

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"Go on and git your doctor, then," answered the same voice, indifferently. "You'll need him wuss before mawnin' if you don't give that nigger up."

It may have been ten minutes later when Colfax returned with Dr. Hammond—a tall, broad-shouldered, athletic young fellow, wearing a silk hat, double-breasted frock-coat and white waistcoat, and carrying a medicine-case. As the pair mounted the steps the physician's unusual size and conspicuous garb made a figure likely to impress itself upon the watchers under the trees; and it was upon this impression that Colfax depended for the success of his ruse.

Aleck Sherwood, one of the posse, was posted at an open window on the second floor, where the gloom was so dense from the overhanging foliage that there was no danger of his being detected. Sitting with his back against the casing, his hands clasped around his knees, and his rifle across his lap, he was in a position to hear and see all that could be heard and seen. For thirty minutes, however, after Colfax's return with Dr. Hammond, Panther Creek made no demonstration of any kind. Once only a long-haired, crouching figure, trailing his rifle from one hand, emerged from the darkness, turned down a lantern that was smoking, and then slunk back again.

But the besiegers were by no means idle. A barely audible murmur of conversation came up out of the silence, and Aleck knew that every window below him had been cautiously tried. He occasionally made out a dark figure moving among the trees, and heard the swish of liquor in jugs, the hollow boom of drawn corn-



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cob corks, and the gurgle of escaping contents down dry throats. Once, too, he heard a loud crash of glass in the direction of Flannigan's saloon, followed by sharp curses.

"Them boys must be powerful dry," murmured Aleck, as he ran his tongue over his lips.

But suddenly, just after the sweet, tremulous fluting of a screech-owl—as Aleck supposed it to be—all was deathly still. Aleck did not know it then, but that stillness was the result of the reappearance of Dr. Hammond and Norman Colfax at the front door. Side by side they descended the steps, passed between the two lanterns at the bottom, and started down the walk. Hammond looked pale; but the fact was scarcely noticeable in the uncertain light, and he swung his medicine-case carelessly as he walked along, not at all like a scared man.

"Don't come back no more, neither of you," came the sentinel's voice out of the darkness. "You'll be better off to hum."

"Very well," answered Colfax, and Hammond bowed his assent.

They proceeded directly to where Colfax's saddle-horse was still tied. Hammond was on Colfax's left, and kept that position with military precision, even while Colfax was untying his mare. Indeed, a good eye might have observed from a short distance, that both their arms—Hammond's right and Colfax's left—moved simultaneously; and a good ear, a very good ear, might have caught the clink of a chain.

"We have no time to get another horse, Elias,"

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said Colfax. "They may make an attack and discover your absence at any minute now. You ride and I'll walk. I am going to take you out to Major Hawley's. That's the safest place for you, and the last place they'd think of searching—if it comes to searching. Don't rub that flour off your face yet. We may meet some one on the road. I have risked my life to save yours. If you show ingratitude by attempting to escape, I'll shoot you down like a dog. Move on, Flossie."

"I wish you could have seen them Panther Crickers' faces when I come out and announced the trick we'd played on 'em, after Norm had had plenty of time to get away," observed Keeler, an evening or two later, to an admiring audience in front of Harkness's harness-shop. "They was about the worst sold lot you ever saw, and they wouldn't believe me till I showed 'em Doc Hammond in his shirt-sleeves, grinnin' like a baboon. It was a slick scheme. *And* it took nerve. If them Crickers had detected that nigger in Doc's clothes, some funerals would have been due about this time. Why didn't I arrest some of 'em the next day? Well, they hadn't really *done* anything, except smash Mike Flannigan's window. And when you consider that it was his popskull booze that helped to make them Crickers crazy, I don't think Mike had any kick comin'."

## CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTINE recovered rapidly, although the elixir which doubtless did most of the work was one which Dr. Berry wot little of. Her first outdoor excursion was to walk to the stables one morning with her grandfather, when he was setting out on his daily round.

The Major was usually in the saddle by half-past seven. Sometimes he was out only an hour, but oftener it was until noon—watching, according to season, the work in the fields, scanning the growing fruit, kneeling in strawberry or melon patch, or testing the condition of the soil with his whip-handle. He superintended the building of fences, the laying of tile, the felling of trees, and looked after the thousand and one wants of an estate the size of his.

It was hard work, yet it was also the sweetest pleasure of his life. It had preserved him hale and hearty to the verge of eighty. In the blooming trees and growing grain, he saw God. The lush meadow, the cool wood, the billowy expanses of wheat, the rustling ranks of corn, all told him over and over again a story of which he never tired—the marvelous story of Nature. The trumpet-flowers in the fence-rows nodded him a good-morning; the violets smiled up from his feet; the wild roses turned their delicately flushed cheeks to be

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kissed by his eyes; and how many nests he and Black Prince peeped into each summer, they never told.

On this particular morning, however, the Major was not happy. For one thing, a drought had prevailed for five weeks. In that time only one brief, unnatural shower of big drops had fallen. Day after day hot winds from the arid southwest had swept over the fair lands of the Mississippi Valley like the withering breath of some fiery monster. Morning after morning, when Elias stepped out on the veranda before breakfast, the gilded horse on the weather-vane was still headed for the desolate mesas of Arizona. The Little Blue-stone had shriveled to a runlet; and the pool which had earlier served as a combination looking-glass and bath-tub for a phœbe which had built under the bridge, was now only an ugly bed of clay. The corn was beginning to curl.

But it was a vastly heavier thing than a possible failure of crops which weighed Elias's heart down most to-day. He had been doing a little sum in addition. He had been putting two and two together, and he had found, as many another man has found, that they made four. In short, he had come to the disheartening conclusion that Christine cared more for Colfax than he had ever believed possible before. She might even love him, though he gagged at the word. She, his dearly beloved granddaughter, in love with Norman Colfax, a man who was unfit to sweep the ground over which she was to tread! One moment the thought made him cold; the next it roused his passionate nature to a fury which boded little good for somebody.

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Having little relish for his ride this morning, he returned about nine o'clock. He found Amos Ernhardt, a well-digger, striding up and down the barnyard with a forked stick in his hands, and followed by an interested group from the kitchen. Christine, still pale, sat to one side. Now and then the butt of the fork in the diviner's hands, which was carried uppermost, would suddenly swing down and point to the center of the earth. Mr. Ernhardt would then stop, cast a reflective eye over the group, and gravely nod his head.

"If you could strike a vein anywhere within ten feet of that grindstone, Amos," said the Major with perfect gravity, "it would be convenient for watering the stock."

"I'll try," said Amos, non-committally. "This is an apple-fork I've got, and tain't workin' like a hazel would. It ain't got the pull. I've located one good flow for you already, though—over there by the hen-coop."

Seizing the fork again, a prong in each hand, with his elbows sticking out on either side, Amos advanced upon the grindstone, passed it, swung in a quarter circle, and re-passed the stone at right angles to his former path. No water! Beginning again, he paralleled his first course at a distance of three feet, passed the stone, quarter-circled, came back, and—in the very midst of his dubious headshaking the fork swung down with a vigorous motion.

"Water, by hen!" exclaimed Mr. Ernhardt. "I wouldn't have believed it from the lay of the ground."

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"How do you explain it, grandpa?" asked Christine, a little later, when she was doing fancy work in the big study chair, with one foot under her, and Elias was at his desk.

"In simplest terms, it's imagination. Amos believes the fork will go down, and naturally it does go down."

"But he tried to hold it back, before you came, until the bark actually peeled off in his hands. I saw it."

"He thought he held back. All he did was to *grip* the fork. He turned it down himself, just as before, though involuntarily. He didn't really exert a pound of upward pressure, or of course it would have snapped that slender stem in an instant."

According to his daily custom for sixty years, he entered in his journal the temperature, direction of the wind, and condition of the crops. He also noted the fact that Amos Ernhardt had begun a new well. But his entries were briefer than usual.

"Christine, Norman Colfax was out here the night of the riot, was he not?" he asked, swinging about in his chair.

For no good reason, except perhaps the suddenness of the question, Chris felt herself blushing.

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you say nothing to me about it?"

"In the excitement which followed, I forgot all about it. I should have told you; but grandmother knew it, of course."

"Did you send for him?"

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"Yes, sir."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because I was anxious about Elias."

"I was in town at the time, was I not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you more faith in Norman Colfax to save Elias than in me?"

"Certainly not, grandfather," she answered reproachfully. "But he's a younger man than you—and he was a deputy—and was to be on hand all night."

"You weren't alarmed for *his* safety?"

She flushed again. "I—I didn't think of that at all."

For a moment the old man looked moodily out of the window; then a peculiar, hard light filled his eyes.

"Christine, do you love Norman Colfax? Answer by yes or no."

She turned marble white, but promptly answered:

"Yes."

Elias might have traced about her young lips some of the same determination which had made furrows about his own. But there was no conscious opposition on her part as yet—only sorrow.

"Do you intend to marry him?"

"Grandfather, I——"

"Yes or no."

"Grandfather," she exclaimed, protestingly, crushing her needlework into her lap, "I will not answer that question by yes or no. I cannot. I do not know. That is, I cannot decide what is right. I have been thinking it over so much. I——"

## *THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY*

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"If you have told him that you love him, I presume he takes it for granted that you will marry him." His tone was inscrutable. It might or might not have been sarcastic.

"He did not know until the other night that I loved him. He knows that you dislike him. He knows that while I love him, I love you, too—and loved you first."

With quivering lips she slipped over to his knee, her place of refuge since babyhood in time of trouble, and laying her soft cheek against his rough skin, began to cry. Marvelously beautiful were the eyes into which he looked—fathomless, luminous and pure.

"Oh, grampsy!" she sobbed. "Why do you hate him whom I love?"

"Because young women often trade hearts with men as boys trade jack-knives—'unsight, unseen.' You know how much I love you. You know that I wouldn't put a stone in the path of your happiness, but would do all in my power to remove one. Don't you know that?"

"Yes," said she.

"I held you in my hands before you were three hours old, and I have loved you from that moment—at first for your mother's sake, later for your own. I have watched you grow up, day by day, and noted each new shoot of character as you have put it forth. The day you shed your swaddling-clothes, your first little red shoes and stockings, your first doll, the first time you wore your hair on top of your head, and served notice on me that you were no longer a little girl—all these I remember.



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"I have trembled at thought of the day when you must leave me, for when you are gone there will be no more little girls for me. Yet I have been consoled by the reflection that your going would be in the course of nature, a step upward, a phase of your development, necessary to your full happiness and the attainment of your womanly estate. Can you not imagine with what intensity I have watched the unfolding of your heart, and how anxiously I have swept the horizon to see what manner of man approached to claim that heart? And now, daughter, much as it grieves me to say it—for I know it will grieve you, too—I cannot believe that he who has appeared is worthy of the honor. I cannot believe that he will make you happy."

"Why, dear?" she asked plaintively.

"It would be hard to say just why. I cannot tell you in a moment what I have been years in learning. But I know him well, my child. I knew his father, and his grandfather before him. Norman is a gentleman, and as soft-spoken as a woman; but he has the temper of a volcano, and I have seen him storm like a madman. The night the apple-house burned, five years ago, when he was chief of the volunteer fire department, he raged like a lion."

"But I have heard you say yourself, grandpa, that his anger was justified by the stupidity and cowardice of the men."

"So it was, so far as that kind of anger is ever justified," admitted the Major, blandly unconscious of his own reputation in that line. "But suppose he should ever turn upon you, my dear, in that manner!"

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"Grandfather dear, I have no more fear of his doing that to me than I have of your doing it," said she earnestly.

"Well, I shall not insist upon that part of his character. But he is vacillating. He is not a good provider. He has managed to scrape together a few thousand dollars, it is true; but it has been more by luck than contrivance, and a reckless venture will some day sweep it all away. He has no idea of the value of money. The woman who marries him will never be sure of support."

Christine closed her lips dissentingly, but made no answer. To argue with her grandfather was always worse than useless. But her heart swelled proudly as she recalled some of the quixotic acts of generosity which had given Norman Colfax a reputation for improvidence among a certain class of penny-wise people. Her generous grandfather did not belong to that class, and she knew that he must be hard pushed for charges against Colfax to adopt this hue and cry.

"The trait runs all through him," continued the Major. "He keeps the most disorderly office in town, they tell me. He is careless in dress. The most expert accountant in the state of Illinois could not tell from Colfax's books, I'll warrant, how much money he has made in the past year."

"Uncle Lyman keeps a slovenly office, too, grandfather; but everybody loves him. And I don't consider carelessness in dress a very heinous thing. He isn't very careless, and I could overcome that. I should like to feel as though there was something I could do

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for him." She suddenly paused as she felt his hand slip from her waist.

"You speak as if it were all settled," said he coldly. "Didn't you tell me a moment ago that you didn't know whether you ought to marry him or not?"

She flushed indignantly.

"Do you mean to insinuate, grandfather, that I tried to deceive you?"

"I fear that you have deceived yourself."

"It is possible," she answered, repelled by his tone; and rising from his knee she picked up her work from the floor. "My heart may be wiser than my head."

"Don't be too sure of that," said he sternly. "It is your head, not your heart, with which you will need to weigh what I have said to-day. Delicacy forbade it before, but you compel me now to urge against this man the disrespect which he has shown for a man of my age on various occasions in the past—his corrupt political affiliations—the commonplace atmosphere, as compared with yours, in which he has lived all his life. And I may as well tell you now, Christine, as ever, that I can never consent to your marriage with him. As his wife, you can never be to me what you are now. If you do go to him, you must say farewell to me."

Christine recoiled as from a blow. The blood left her face, and a strange look, like that of fear or horror—a look which Elias Hawley never forgot—came into her eyes. She opened her lips, with a little gasp, as if to speak; but no sound came forth, and she slowly left the room. At the door she paused—neither of them afterward knew for how long. A great silence fell.

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Through the windows came the rasp of the grasshoppers on the lawn. Then, without turning his head, Elias heard the soft rustle of her skirts receding toward the dining-room.

Mrs. Hawley was seated at one end of the big mahogany table, cutting out labels for the grape jelly which she and Cordelia had made that morning.

"Why, what is the matter, Christine?" she asked in alarm, at the girl's bloodless face.

"Grandfather and I have been talking about Norman," answered Christine, in a low, dead voice.

The grandmother said nothing just then. There was so little she could say. Christine hastily poured herself a glass of water and vanished. Estelle, who was not above eavesdropping, slipped out of a side passage near the study door and followed her mistress upstairs. As she passed the study, she glanced in at Major Hawley's broad back and bald crown, still as immovable as if cast in cement.

"You ole devil!" she muttered spitefully. "If I was Mr. Norm and Miss Chris I'd git married *to-night*."

She found Christine lying on the bed, with her face buried in the pillows to stifle the sobs which shook her from head to foot. The contents of her work-basket were scattered over the coverlet, where she had flung them down. Estelle stood in sorrow for a moment, and then stretched herself beside her beloved mistress.

"Don't cry that-a-way, honey, don't cry that-a-way! Don't let that ole grandpaw of your'n break you' haht. Mr. Norm loves you juss the same, and if you'll juss say the word he'll come and git you in a

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minute. Everybody knows he'd juss lay down and kiss the ground you walked over, which I ain't seen ole Maje Hawley do yit. Sugar-plum, don't you know you're goin' to git you' eyes all red, and not be fittin' for dinner at all? *Please* stop, honey girl! It breaks my haht to see you cry that-a-way. Don't *I* know what a temper that ole man got! Whew! The ole wild-cat! I'm goin' to git some cool watch now and wash you' face. Please set up, sugar, and lemme do it. You juss *mustn't* cry no mo'."

But the girl was too deeply wounded to recover her self-control at once, and for nearly an hour the hard, convulsive sobs shook her at regular intervals, while ever and anon a little despairing cry escaped her set teeth and drove the excitable Estelle half wild with fear. But at last the storm was over, save for an occasional belated wave of emotion that came rolling in. Estelle pressed the damp hair back from Christine's hot face, and then went downstairs for some cool water. When she returned, her mistress was sitting on the edge of the bed, disheveled, flushed, and with swollen eyes, a picture to melt a heart of stone.

"I declare, honey," said Estelle cheerfully, as she drew a chair near and set the basin on it, "if Mr. Norm could see you now he'd juss eat you up, he'd feel that sorry."

"Oh, Estelle, I am so unhappy!" said Christine, in a voice hoarse from crying. "This morning the world was so bright, and now it's so dark. And I'm afraid it will never be bright any more." She ended in a final little wail, her face twitching with pain.

## *THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY*

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“Oh, yes, it will,” said Estelle soothingly. “I juss know it will. It’s boun’ to.”

With deft fingers she let down the thick brown hair, removed the wet strands which clung to Christine’s temples, and then applied the cool wash-rag to her feverish face.

## CHAPTER XIV

"Isn't Christine coming down to dinner?" inquired Major Hawley, as he carved the roast.

"I believe not," answered Mrs. Hawley, without lifting her eyes from the sliced tomatoes she was preparing for the Major with his favorite dressing.

"Why?" he asked, after a pause, in the mildest of tones. His anger had evaporated.

"She has been crying, I think."

He made no explanation, and she asked for none. After fifty years of married life, of the intricacies of bed and board, of communion morning, noon, and night, and of standing together by the cradle and the grave, explanations between husband and wife are usually superfluous. The meal was eaten almost in silence, and immediately afterward Major Hawley ordered his buggy. This vehicle had been built to order and was a stalwart affair, broad of beam and strong of spring, capable of accommodating both Elias and his brother Granville—a combined weight of nearly six hundred pounds.

The Major did not take Billy along to-day, as usual. He preferred to be alone. The dust on the road was almost intolerable. It shot from beneath the horse's hoofs in little explosive puffs; it rose in blinding, suffocating clouds, shutting out the landscape, filling

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the Major's mouth and nose until he gasped for breath, coating his broad shoulders, and imparting a gritty surface to whip and lines. The wayside grass and weeds wore gray, unnatural faces, like powdered masqueraders. In the village the lawns were brown and lifeless; foot-prints were becoming visible in the thick deposit on the sidewalks; and the doors and windows were tightly closed by careful housewives against the noiseless, insidious drift of dust.

As Bay Fanny jogged into town Elias saw, some distance ahead, through the vista formed by the arching trees, a girlish figure in white, with parasol and daintily lifted skirts, all dappled with sunshine and shade. It was a pretty picture, and his conscience smote him as he thought of *his* little girl at home, dinnerless, sore from sobbing, and still grieving in her darkened room.

It was Saturday, and the hitching-rack around the court-house square was lined with wagons, buggies, and saddle-horses from the country. The horses were of a thin and wiry type, mostly, not prepossessing in appearance, but capable of their eight or ten miles an hour. The men who owned these horses were, for the most part, thin and wiry, too. They stood about, and talked, and spat copiously while their wives shopped. Signs of prosperity were not lacking; but from the number of rusty backs, battered hats, and broken shoes it was evident either that much of the land was poor or that the languid climate had laid her seductive hand upon the brow of too many of these sons of toil, lulling their ambition to sleep and inviting their limbs to repose.



## ***THE HOUSE OF HAWLEY***

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Major Hawley knew nearly every farmer within a radius of ten miles, and he shook the hand of many to-day, pausing here and there to exchange notes on the drought or the apple crop. In the bank, where he checked out a fat roll of bills, an uncombed, dusty individual—evidently a farmer of the lowest class—awkwardly approached the Major and asked for a word in private.

“Well, sir,” said the Major, not encouragingly, when they had stepped aside.

“Major, I promised my wife a sewin’-machine to-day,” began the man, with a slight tremor in his voice. “I been promisin’ it to her for a year, but to-day I promised it for sure, and brung her to town to pick it out. I had five dollars in the bank here, and I brung in a load of mushmelons to sell, and counted on collectin’ ten dollars that Doc Sprague has owed me for hawgs since last spring. I thought I could scrape up twenty dollars—that’s what we have to pay down on the machine. But Doc’s out of town and I’m stuck, and the woman is over at Leffingwell’s right now, pickin’ out the machine. I ain’t got the heart to go and tell her she can’t have it, after all, Major, and I ain’t got the money to go and pay up. I been standin’ here half an hour, projectin’ what I’d do, and when I seen you come in I wondered if you’d let me have ten dollars till I could git mine from Sprague.”

Elias tightened his fingers over the roll of bills in his pocket, and dropped his sharp eyes from the suppliant’s peaked, unshaven face to the floor, reflectively.

“Tom,” said he slowly, “I hate to refuse a poor

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man money. I hate it doubly when the brunt of my refusal will fall on his wife, who is not responsible for her husband's shiftlessness and dishonesty. Those are hard words, Tom, but you know they are true. Twice have I loaned you money, and each time you have broken your solemn engagement to repay it. You probably didn't have the money to repay with, but you could have come to me, like a man, and said so. To loan a man like you money is putting a premium on dishonesty, and is doing him more harm than good. You probably never took that view of it, did you?"

"No, sir, I never did," admitted Tom, with engaging candor, and turning over his quid with the air of a man whose soul is wide open to conviction. At the same time he watched the Major's face, from the ambush of his rusty eyebrows, with the hungry gaze that a hidden fox fixes on an approaching pullet, which may or may not come near enough to be seized.

"But I don't want to be too hard on any man," continued Elias. "Now I'll be picking apples soon, and will need all the help I can get. If you'll promise to come over and work out your total debt to me, at a dollar and a quarter a day, I'll step over to Leffingwell's store and hand your wife ten dollars."

"I'll do that, Maje, you bet, and be glad to," answered Tom, promptly. "You've made one woman happy to-day."

"I have also made one unhappy," muttered Elias, with his mind on Christine.

After turning ten dollars over to Tom's wife, who never knew how perilously near she had once more come

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to missing her long-coveted sewing-machine, Elias stepped into his son Lyman's office. This ramshackle, one-story building squatted between two taller structures and bore a rusty tin sign lettered "NOTARY PUBLIC—REAL ESTATE AND INSURANCE." Dangling below this by two pieces of wire was a small board announcing, in Lyman's own blundering print, that Hogs and Cattle were also Bought and Sold by him—the capital "S" being upside down.

The low-ceiled room contained a desk, two or three straight-backed chairs in a rather shaky condition, a picture of Henry Clay's last speech before the Senate, and a discolored county map. On the floor in one corner was a little mound of coal, gray with the dust of many months—a sample from some mine in which Lyman had once been "interested." In another corner stood some tall stalks of corn, with their tassels touching the ceiling—the present of some proud farmer. A shotgun and a brace of pistols hung on the wall. Papers, ears of sample corn, stumps of cigars, a saddle, fishing-rod, and other odds and ends littered table and floor.

In striking contrast to the dingy interior, like a diamond in a beggar's bosom, was a brand-new rocking-chair, glistening with varnish and gay in its red upholstery. In the center of the room, also, on a little stand, sat a phonograph. From its comparative lack of dust it was evident that this instrument, too, was new. It was, in fact, only a week old, and thus far Lyman had carefully wiped it off each morning with his handkerchief. When Elias entered the room the phonograph was in full blast, grinding out a wheezy, asth-

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matic imitation of the "Washington Post March," while Lyman, sunk in the depths of his rocking-chair, with his great feet cocked on the desk, softly whistled an accompaniment between his teeth. But lazy and immovable as he looked, he rose at once upon his father's entrance and offered him the rocker.

"Sit down, father," said he, as the music ceased in a series of gritty, unearthly sounds. "I was just having a little tune. That's a wonderful little invention."

"How much did it cost?" asked the Major, briefly.

"Only ten dollars. I've got that much pleasure out of it already and I ain't had it a week. It helps my thoughts, too. But Daisy wants it, and I suppose I'll have to take it up to the house. What will you have?" he asked, opening a box of wax cylinders. "'Alabama Coon,' 'Ma Lady Lu,' 'Lohengrin,' 'Liberty Bell,' 'Old Kentucky Home'?" I've got all the favorites."

"Give me 'Old Kentucky Home,'" said Elias, with a smile at the enthusiasm of his big boy.

Lyman rewound the machine, and after several essays with his clumsy hands got it to going. While the piece was in progress the Major, not wholly abandoning himself to the witchery of the music, glanced critically about the room.

"Lyman," said he, at the end, "if there is a dirtier office than this in the state of Illinois, I have failed to see it. Why don't you have Judith come down once a month, say, and sweep out for you?"

"It ain't much use to sweep out this weather, father," answered the son complacently, as he picked out the soundest chair in the room, aside from the

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rocker, and let himself cautiously down upon it, like an elephant testing a bridge. "I do sweep out occasionally, but you'd never know it a week after. Did you hear about Elias? He pleaded guilty this morning, and was sentenced to two years in the penitentiary."

"I am sorry, very sorry—not so much for him as for old Jubilee and Susie," answered the old man sadly. "It will just about finish her. Yet it was a light sentence, considering his crime."

"It won't worry old Jube much," said Lyman, philosophically. "He's getting childish. How's Chris?"

"She has about recovered," answered Elias soberly. Her name recalled the harassing scene of the forenoon. After an interval of silence he drew out his roll of bills, detached a number, and handed them to Lyman. "There's a hundred dollars for Judith's wedding outfit. I don't know whether you had better tell her that it came from me or not, or give it to her all at once. She's an extravagant girl, Lyman, and if she learns that this money is a windfall, so to speak, she'll simply extend her expenditures that much."

"I'd rather tell her, father, if you don't object. That's only honest, and it will make her happy to know that you thought of her. She's a little highfalutin, I'll admit; but she does a good deal of pinchin' and savin', after all."

"Very well," assented Elias indifferently. "I don't suppose it will make much odds." After a pause he added: "What do you know, Lyman, of the relations between Christine and Norman Colfax? Are their names connected by the public?"

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"I rather think they are," answered Lyman, with a twinkle of his gray eyes. "I fancy most people consider them as good as engaged."

"You have never said anything to me about it."

"No. I don't *know* that they are engaged. And to tell you the truth, father, I didn't consider it any of my business."

"Isn't the happiness of a niece of yours any of your business?" asked the Major sharply.

"Yes, sir—a good deal of my business. That is just why I haven't interfered. I think Chris is old enough to choose for herself," answered the son, respectfully but firmly.

"Old—old—old!" repeated Elias, slowly and half scornfully. "Twenty-three years old! A sage! Why, man, she's a baby yet."

"To you, yes. So is Judith to me. But it is a fact, nevertheless, that babes of that age are choosing husbands for themselves every day, and, on the whole, not doing it badly."

"I say they *are* doing it badly!" exclaimed the Major. "Look at our courts, grinding out divorces night and day, and hearts breaking all around us! But I don't care what other people are doing. As long as I retain my faculties, I shall continue to govern my family and exercise a care for their happiness, even though I get no thanks for it. I had a talk with Christine on this subject this morning. It hurt me to do it—it hurts me now to think of it. I made the little thing cry, and she didn't eat any dinner. But one tear shed now will save her a thousand later on. Yes, and

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one dinner missed now will save her from going hungry later, if she is determined to marry that young man. No nigger-loving Republican," he burst out hotly, "no harum-scarum, flighty, quixotic lawyer who lacks common courtesy to a man of my age shall marry my granddaughter. No, not if I have to appeal to force."

Lyman made no answer. When his father reached this stage in an argument, with lightning shooting from his eyes, the son knew, as well as his mother, that words were useless.

Christine's unlucky star was surely in the ascendant that day for as Major Hawley, still simmering with wrath, emerged from his son's office, the first man he saw was Norman Colfax. To make a bad matter worse, Colfax was just turning away from a close conversation with Nicholas Hume, of Anniston, one of the county Republican managers, and a man whom Major Hawley hated as the devil is reputed to hate holy water.

"Mr. Colfax, one word, please!" called the Major, in his politest tone. As Colfax turned, wonderingly, for he was seldom thus favored, the Major added, without apparent passion, but every word falling like a whip-lash:

"Acting within my rights and for what I consider the best interests of my granddaughter, it is my desire, sir, that you call no more at my house."

Colfax's delicate oval face slowly turned white. For one astonished moment his dark eyes searched the Major's countenance, almost appealingly, for some alleviating sign. Then he recovered himself.

"Very well, sir," he answered simply.

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"It is also my desire that you do not seek to see her privately anywhere else. I presume your sense of honor, under the circumstances, will restrain you from doing that."

"My sense of honor, Major Hawley, needs no coaching from you," answered the young man scathingly. "I will make you no promises. Good-evening, sir."

The Major glared after the retreating figure, as if half tempted to pursue it. But his anger did not carry him to this excess. Besides, loath as he was to admit it, there was something about Colfax which warned the irate old man not to push him too far.

Christine was lying in a hammock, reading, when her grandfather returned. Dressed all in white, she had never looked fairer or purer in the dotting eyes of Elias Hawley; and his old heart, strange mixture of tenderness and hardness, beat quicker when she gave him a smile.

"Wasn't it very dusty?" she asked cheerfully, in a voice which was still a little hoarse.

"Very dusty, my dear." He bent down over her with a supplicating smile. "Am I forgiven, darling?"

"How could I withhold forgiveness from one who loves me so?" she asked sweetly, and gave him a kiss.

But the kiss, somehow, did not make the grandsire happy. His encounter with Colfax had begun to trouble his conscience already. There was no turning backward now, however, and it was manifestly only fair for him to tell Christine at once what he had done. Yet in this moment of reconciliation, he could not bring



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himself to the cruel task; and as she laid her quiet kiss, like a peace-offering on his lips—lips which, only a short half hour before, had so pitilessly castigated her lover—Major Hawley felt as much like a traitor as he ever had in his life.

## CHAPTER XV

A DAY or two after his father's call, Lyman Hawley was again snugly settled in his new rocking-chair, with his head pillowed comfortably upon its upholstered back. His half-closed eyes were fixed on the ceiling, and his fat hands spread restfully upon the arms of the chair, while the smoke from his cigar ascended in a slender blue column. For a reason which appeared later, he had removed his shoes, and his stocking feet rested on a newspaper spread on the floor. A more perfect picture of relaxation and repose would have been hard to find.

Yet Lyman was far from a state of repose, mentally. His home was in a turmoil over Judith's trousseau, and the drafts upon his pocket-book were of a depth and frequency which had stirred even his phlegmatic nature. His father's gift—which, on second thought, he had not yet revealed to Judith—had relieved the situation somewhat; but Lyman felt it in his bones that as soon as Judith got the money she would promptly amplify her plans to absorb it.

Lyman could, in his peculiar fashion, have "financed" the trousseau alone without much difficulty. But Mrs. Hawley, who was simply an earlier edition of Judith in her love for fine things, wanted a new parlor carpet for the wedding, some new table linen, and other

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new things not expensive in themselves but making a formidable aggregate. There could be no doubt that all these new things were needed, and had long been needed; and Lyman, who knew how many accustomed little luxuries his wife had foregone all their married life long, could not find it in his heart to say her nay, except in a feeble and perfunctory way. So, though it brought the moisture to his brow when he paused to think of it, he had plunged into the mire of expenditure almost as recklessly as Judith and her mother themselves.

He had resolved, for one thing, to finish the cement walk from his front door to the gate, and at this very moment the men were at work upon it. This piece of enterprise had had a curious history. Lyman had contemplated a new walk for something like five years. He had therefore abstained, throughout that period, from making any repairs on the old one. The year before it had seemed as if something must be done; but Lyman and his family had continued to stumble and stagger over the teetering, warped and rotten plank structure until some time in March of the present year. Then, Daisy having tripped over a loose board and dislocated her knee-cap, Lyman brought himself to action. He telephoned to the Hermitage for old Sherman, who still solicited odd jobs—at a very low figure—to come and tear up the old walk.

In the course of a week or ten days old Sherman, with an ax on his shoulder, shambled rheumatically through the gate one morning. By the end of three days he had taken up the fifty or sixty feet of walk, and

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piled the rotten boards and stringers on the grass. At this point Lyman, with characteristic short-sightedness and generosity, had paid the old darky in full for the work. Jubilee's "rheumatics" at once took a turn for the worse; he failed to appear the next morning, and the unsightly pile of waste basked in the sun for a month, bleaching the grass beneath.

Judith, like her father, was long-suffering, and allowed few things to disturb her serenity. But one afternoon, on returning from a call, she made up her mind that those ugly boards should go to the back yard. And go they did, that very evening, on a wheelbarrow pushed by her panting, perspiring, bareheaded father, while the filial child, clad in cool dimity and lolling in her hammock, laughed mischievously behind her book.

For some days after this the family and visitors continued to flounder ankle-deep through the black mold marking the site of the old walk. But matters were under way, and one morning a tired-looking individual in a one-horse wagon backed up to the curb in front, and unloaded a ton or so of sand. The next day he came with another ton. Perhaps he would have come again the third day, as he had promised; but it rained, the spell of labor was broken, and they saw *him* no more. But as the work was now in the contractor's hands, Lyman did not allow this to worry him.

It was two weeks before the barrel of Portland cement arrived. But as if to make amends for this delay, Barstow's dray came rattling up the street the very next day and dumped off a sand-screen close by the barrel of cement. Then came a lull. The Hawleys,

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having by this time tramped the loose mold down into a fairly good path, paid no attention to the flight of time. Lyman saw Meshach Gill the contractor at the post-office every day; but he had a constitutional dislike of hurrying any one, and in this particular case it would have been inconvenient for him to pay for the completed work at that time.

Thus the summer days and weeks drowsed by. The children of the neighborhood played in the sand, spreading it over a wider and wider area. The boys bored gimlet holes in the barrel of cement to see what was inside, and tried their jack-knives on the sand-screen to prove that they would cut wire. But with the approach of Judith's marriage, all this was changed; and only two days after the time was set, Meshach Gill and his men appeared on the scene.

Lyman Hawley was by no means an impatient man, as may be surmised from this; but he broke his reverie in the rocking-chair this afternoon two or three times in the course of a half hour in order to look at his watch. Finally, after a dubious glance from his stocking feet to the dusty floor, he rose and tiptoed to the door. Thrusting his head out, he gazed up and down the hot, deserted street.

"Come here, bub!" he called, beckoning with his hand. He returned to his chair with a sigh, and a moment later a barefooted boy pattered into the room.

"Son, I wish you'd trot around to Andy Hall's shoe-shop and see if he's got my shoes half-soled yet. He's had 'em three hours, and I've got something to do besides sit and wiggle my toes. You needn't tell him

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that, though; he may have been busy. If he's just finishing them up, you wait for 'em. I don't reckon this is your busy day."

The boy had scarcely disappeared when a vision of feminine loveliness floated up to the door, folded her parasol as daintily as a dove folds its wings, and hovered an instant on the threshold to glance at something down the street. Then passing her hands over the low curve of her hips to smooth her fluffy white skirt, she entered the room with a soft, bewitching rustle of summer fabrics—as pure, clean and fragrant as a zephyr fresh from trysting with a honeysuckle.

Judith's dark, heavy-coiled hair shone like jet under the brim of her white hat. Her skin, pearly rather than white, glowed with health and formed a splendid background for her slender, black brows and large, dark eyes. Her face was full—a little too full to suit herself—but the flesh was as firm as that of a nymph just risen from some cold spring; and though she could not deny her one hundred and forty pounds, there was nothing about her trim bosom, well-braced shoulders and graceful carriage even to suggest obesity.

Spotless as she herself was—still glowing from her bath and garbed like a lily—she seemed oblivious of the dirt and dust of her father's office, and sank down unconcernedly upon one of his questionable chairs. Then her roving eyes fell upon his socks..

"Where on earth are your shoes, papa?" she demanded.

"Around at Andy Hall's, being fixed."

"How long have they been there?"

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"About three hours."

"Does he know that you are waiting for them?"

"I reckon he does. I have sent word to him by three men and two boys in the last hour."

"Papa!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "What *will* they think of you? They'll think you have only one pair of shoes!"

"If I've got another pair, I'm not aware of the fact."

Judith glanced down involuntarily at her own glove-fitting, patent-leather boot. Perhaps she also thought of the three or four additional pairs in her shoe-box at home. Anyhow, her severe face relaxed, her ripe lips parted in a smile, and she emitted a low laugh—mischievous and tender.

"You ought to buy you some, then, daddy. Don't tell mamma and I won't either. She'd raise an awful row." She hooked her parasol over the back of the chair and stepped inquisitively over to the phonograph. "You better not forget to bring this machine up home with you to-night, or you'll hear from Daisy again at supper time. What's on now?"

"Look out there now, Jude, or you'll bust that machine!" exclaimed Lyman, hastily rising as she recklessly spun the crank around. "You and Daisy will ruin it in twenty minutes if I do take it up to the house. I've got the 'Darky's Dream' on now, and it's a hummer. Stand back, and I'll start her."

As the inspiring melody rolled out of the phonograph's brass throat, Judith puckered her pretty lips in a whistle and beat time with her head. Then, the

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rhythm getting into her blood, she seized her father's hand, with a kindling, roguish eye, slipped one arm around his mighty waist, and invited him to dance. Protesting in the beginning, urging first his unshod feet and then his weight, but all in vain, he soon yielded to his daughter's infectious spirits; and in a moment the pair were careening around the room in a furious two-step. Lyman winced as his unprotected toes now and then struck a lump of coal or an ear of corn; but he was not the man to let trifles balk his pleasure, and he swung the laughing girl with a vigor which sent her skirts trailing out behind, and momentarily revealed—had there been any one to see—a neat, clocked stocking.

In the height of the fun the boy returned with the shoes; but Lyman, taking the whiphand now himself, would not release the blushing Judith until the music stopped. Then both sank panting into chairs. Judith tried to look dignified in the presence of the boy; but when her father thrust his legs straight out in front of him, to cool his burning soles, she burst into laughter.

“What's the joke?” asked Lyman.

“Look at the bottom of your feet! They are as black as tar. I can't let you put your shoes on over those socks. Give me some money and I'll go and get you a new pair. I want two dollars besides for myself, please.”

“What do you want two dollars for?” he asked, as he drew his wallet from his hip pocket. But the question was simply a matter of form. He worshiped his handsome daughter, and he would have given her the money had she wanted to buy a pet polar bear.



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"Such a question as that, papa, to a young woman deep in the mysteries of her trousseau, is exceedingly embarrassing in the presence of a member of the other sex," answered Judith, with a facetious glance at the barefooted urchin.

"Well, never mind my socks," grunted Lyman. "You'd probably get them too small anyway. I'll wipe these off and make them do till morning. It's your doings, anyhow, and I'll tell your mother so if she takes me to task for it." He handed her a five-dollar bill. "Bring back three dollars."

"Yes, sir," said she dutifully, and added: "I may need a trifle over two dollars."

"Mr. Hall said them shoes would be seventy-five cents," spoke up the boy as Judith passed out, leaving a faint trail of perfume behind her.

"I suppose you told him I'd pay him," observed Lyman, coolly inspecting the repairs. After gruntingly drawing the shoes on, making himself very red in the face, he leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "You just lace them up for me, son, will you? When I'm home my little girl 'most always does it for me. I give her a nickel for the job if she don't skip any holes, and that's what I'll give you. They need blacking, too, I guess, don't they? If I had some blacking here, I'd let you do that, too. I suppose you always black your pa's shoes."

"He don't never use blackin'," answered the lad.

Five minutes later Lyman stood on the sidewalk. He had often thought of buying a blacking outfit for his office, but had never yet got around to it. Therefore, on the rare occasions when he felt the need of a shine he

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repaired to either Bertram's drug-store or Leffingwell's, and made use of their outfit. At this moment he wavered between the two places. Then recalling that he had gone to Bertram's last, some three weeks before, he turned in at Leffingwell's.

Just as Judith came out of the store, after doing her shopping, Christine Hawley drove up with her dog-cart and spotted pony. Judith climbed in, and the pair rode out to look at the house which was to be Judith's future home—a fine old structure on the edge of the village, in the heart of a ten-acre grove. Something new in the shape of furniture was arriving almost every day from St. Louis, and Judith was as happy as a child peeping into a Christmas stocking.

Judith was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the county, but she was also generally believed to carry a rather cold heart within her comely bosom. After a number of desperate flirtations, covering a period of several years, she had finally accepted Charles Flaster, cashier of the Barnwell National Bank and son of its president. He was a quiet, unassuming, frugal young fellow, the last man in the world one would have picked out for the dashing Judith Hawley's husband—aside from the fact that he had money, as some people had insinuated; and Christine could not help thinking of these things as she listened to Judith's critical estimates of the various articles which had arrived since her last visit.

When they were in the dog-cart again, bound for Lyman Hawley's house, Judith observed, after a period of silence: "Chris, I used to think I could never love

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a small man—I suppose Charlie would be called small. I used to picture my husband as a man who could toss me in the air and catch me as I came down—though that was before I weighed in at one-forty,” she added drolly. “But I don’t attach as much importance to tossing as I did. Charlie is very different from papa or grandfather, and some people might think him effeminate. But while he is gentle and magnanimously ready to yield, usually, he can be as firm as a rock when it comes to principle.”

“Nobody knows that better than I,” observed Christine.

“Yet, Chris,” continued Judith, laughing, and with a slight flush, “I’ll confess that I still wish that he weighed at least as much as I do. A woman’s weighing more than her husband always struck me, somehow, as a reversal of the eternal fitness of things. I dislike to see a couple where the woman looks as if she could tie her husband in a bow-knot and pin him to her back hair.”

“Oh, Judy!” protested Chris, though laughing. “I am sure you and Charlie don’t look that way.”

Christine went in to see the wedding-gown, which had just received its finishing touches. Scarcely a day had passed, since the trousseau was begun, that Chris had not dropped in to note the growth of the snowy, filmy things—always dear to the heart of woman, but thrice dear when consecrated to the offices of love. To-day Christine caressed the pretty garments with her hands and nursed them in her eyes until the latter grew misty. For she, too, loved and was loved; but no table

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was being spread for *her* marriage-feast, no gossamer robe being woven for *her* bridal night.

The beautiful gown was carefully spread out on Judith's bed. After the girls had admired every detail for perhaps the hundredth time, they stood arm in arm, at the foot of the bed, and gave the dress a general survey. Daisy and Bessie, the younger sisters, had tagged the older girls upstairs, and stood as near as they dared. Bessie, with fascinated eyes, held her hands behind her back, away from temptation. But yielding at last, she laid one artful hand on the foot-board and straightened her grimy little forefinger, very slowly, until it touched the hem of the sacred garment. Judith's eagle eye instantly fell on the inquisitive member.

"Bessie, take your finger away, and you and Daisy, run down stairs," said she authoritatively; and the girls obeyed with an alacrity which their father's command would scarcely have elicited.

"I am going to try on that waist again," said Judith, loosening her belt and tossing it across a chair. "I want you to look at the back. I say it's too full and mamma says it isn't. Whatever you decide will go."

She stripped off her old waist, tossing it also across a chair; and while Christine held the new waist she thrust her beautiful arms and shoulders into it. Chris ruled that it was all right.

"You ought to be very happy, Judy," she added musingly.

"I am happy, Chris, perfectly happy," answered Judith, as she restored the waist to the bed, unconscious of the picture she made with her bare, outstretched arms.

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"Whatever may come to you—sickness or misfortune—anything except the loss of love—you will still be better off than I," continued Chris sadly. "Whatever course I take, I shall wound one that I love."

"Poor coz!" murmured Judith, pressing a kiss upon the other's temple. "But if you let Grandfather Hawley stand in your way, Chris, you will be making the mistake of your life. His dislike for Norman is simply a crotchet, and it's a shame for two people to be made unhappy to gratify such an odious thing."

"But you know how deep even his crotchets go, Judy. If I should marry Norman, I fear it would cloud grandfather's life. If I don't marry him, it will cloud mine—and Norman's."

"Then I'd marry him," said Judith imperiously. "I'd marry him if I had to run away to do it." She was now back in her former waist, and stepping before the glass she plucked at the front of the garment to restore its fulness. "You spoke of everything except the loss of love, Chris," she added, reflectively. "What would you do if you should marry Norman and lose his love?"

"I can't conceive of such a thing," answered Chris, decidedly.

"Can you conceive of losing your love for him?"

"Why, no. It's as much a part of me as my arm, I feel."

"Suppose you married him and he died very soon after. Don't you suppose that you would love and marry again?"

"I can't conceive now of my doing it. But others

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have, and I might. Yet that wouldn't mean that I had ceased to love Norman. My love for him would be purely spiritual then, and wouldn't conflict with a more earthly love, although that, too, would have its spiritual side. Can you conceive of your love for Charlie ever dying?"

"No—not as long as he loved me," answered Judith, in a tone which Christine, loyal as she was to her cousin, did not just relish.

## CHAPTER XVI

NORMAN COLFAX would have been a guest at Judith Hawley's wedding as a matter of course; but his serving as groomsman as well, after being forbidden Elias Hawley's house, was regarded generally as a manifestation of Judith's disapproval of her grandfather's attitude toward Colfax. Christine and Colfax had not met for two weeks; and feeling that a good many curious eyes were on them they were careful, especially in the early part of the evening, neither to seek nor to avoid each other. Moreover, owing to the large number of relatives present—the Hawleys, with true tribal allegiance, were always ready to travel any distance to see one of their number married or buried—Christine was in constant demand.

But later in the evening Major Hawley, who had narrowly observed the couple's bearing toward each other, and had half persuaded himself that he had nipped Christine's "fascination" in the bud, missed them both. Uneasy as this discovery made him, he would have scorned to spy upon them or even to invent a pretext for hunting them up. But when Christine was called upon for a song, he left the room to find her with more alacrity, doubtless, than he would otherwise have shown. He found her on the front porch, in a shadowy nook

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formed by a crimson rambler rose. She was seated, ominously enough, on the wicker settee on which Charlie Flaster had done most of his courting. Colfax, of course, was at her side.

"Christine!" called the Major from the door.  
"You are wanted at the piano. Come, please."

He tarried, but she did not answer or move.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"I can not come just now, grandfather," said she, in a perturbed voice.

"Why not?" he asked, advancing a step.

Then he paused and stood silent a moment. Chris's head was bowed and she held her handkerchief to her eyes. An emotion as near fear as the sturdy old man had ever felt came over him; and he had that peculiar sensation of seeing and hearing something which, somewhere, at some time, he had seen and heard before. At the same instant, his mind reverted to Christine's mother. Yet, standing there in Colfax's presence, he crushed the tenderness which rose in his breast.

"I should advise you to go and make yourself presentable," said he coldly.

As she obediently came forward, followed by Colfax, Elias gave the young man a scornful glance—too personal to be ignored.

"It is not I, sir, who make her cry," said Colfax bluntly.

"Who is it then, pray?" asked the Major, sarcastically.

"Yourself, sir."

Elias turned contemptuously on his heel, for this



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was not the time and place for a controversy. Colfax's dark eyes followed him indignantly.

"But you will not make her cry many more times, old Blood-and-Iron!" he muttered to himself.

This threat, however, was not at once put into effect. Affairs at the Hermitage went on much as before except that a sadness had come over Christine—a sadness which her grandfather, though, was sure that time would remove. By the last of October everything was made snug for winter. The great cellar had received its ample store of apples, cider, vegetables, canned fruits, and ham and bacon. A hundred cords of wood were piled in a triple rank at the rear of the house, for each of the twenty-six rooms of the Hermitage contained either a stove or an old-fashioned fireplace whose cavernous throat swallowed an appalling amount of wood in a single winter night, when the mercury was close to zero and a northwest gale harried the defenseless prairie. The mows were bursting with hay; corn cribs were piled to the roof; the fodder-house was full; great stacks of straw stood in the barn-yard for the cattle to nibble at whenever they chose; and Elias felt like a skipper who stands on the bridge of his vessel before a storm and notes, with complacent eye, the reefed sails, battened hatches and double-lashed boats.

Then came the burning of the leaves—a sort of pastoral festival at the Hermitage. That the grass might not be injured, they had been raked on to the driveway, in one great heap fifty feet long and seven or eight feet high. Beginning at both ends, matches were applied every few feet, on opposite sides, by Billy and

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Pete. After flickering for an instant in natal weakness, the flames quickly scaled the ridge with a crackle like mimic musketry, and soon the whole heap was a seething mass of fire. At first a cloud of acrid smoke rolled across the lawn, forcing the spectators to beat a hasty retreat. But the smoke quickly cleared; a low, continuous roar arose; and the sparks, caught in the upward rush of hot air, were whirled as high as the treetops, where they burned themselves out or drifted away as if to join the stars.

As the heat increased, the watchers screened their faces with their hands, and were once more forced to move back. The negroes, and a number of children whom Diana had brought out from the village to see the sight, clapped their hands in delight and shrieked excitedly as they raced hither and thither to stamp out stray brands. The elders, though, were inclined to soberness as they watched the fierce, destructive element at its work. Elias Hawley's face, illuminated with the yellow flare, was turned up anxiously at intervals to the trail of sparks setting toward the stables. Mrs. Hawley, with a white mantilla over her shoulders, sat close to her husband's rustic chair; and each time that one of the children hurled a fallen bough into the incandescent heap, sending up a fountain of sparks, she timidly laid her hand upon his arm.

Christine was unusually quiet, and as soon as the fire began to burn low she turned toward the house. Diana following, the two walked along arm in arm, but without speaking. Chris had told her grandparents that she would spend the night with Di, as she often did.

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But it was a lie—the first she could remember of ever telling them—for before she slept she expected to be the wife of Norman Colfax.

Shrink as she might from a clandestine marriage, with its deception and notoriety—and she had fought the idea for weeks—it had come to seem the best way for all concerned. Indeed, it was the only way, for, if forewarned, her grandfather would have moved heaven and earth to prevent the marriage. Chris wished to tell her grandmother, but dared not implicate her. Elias's rage would be terrible, and would fall on all who had shared in the deception. As for forgiveness, Chris did not expect it; at least, not at present. She knew her grandfather too well; and as she entered the front door of the old mansion she had a presentiment that it would be for the last time.

“Shall I go up with you?” asked Diana sympathetically, at the foot of the stairs.

Christine shook her head and ascended the steps with a new and strange weariness in her bones. There was pain as well as joy ahead, and at this moment the pain was nearer and loomed larger.

In the corner of her room stood a massive cedar chest which had been in the family for over two hundred years. From this she took a nightgown of exquisite make—brought from Paris some years before by her Uncle Granville, and never yet worn. On the gown she laid two handkerchiefs, her tooth-brush, and a little bottle of tooth-powder. Then she glanced about the room to see if there was anything else. Her eyes fell upon her jewel-case; but the only thing she took from

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it was a little pearl stick-pin which Colfax had given her. With shining eyes she thrust the keepsake into the bosom of the spotless garment on the bed, where it would be over her heart that night. Then she rolled the articles up in a newspaper and slowly left the room. It was just such a package, exteriorly, as she usually carried when she stayed all night with Di, and would excite no suspicion.

When she came down the carriages were waiting with their load of children, and she kissed her grandparents good-night—and good-by. Elias had been unusually tender all day—so it had seemed to her at least—and he now retained her in his arms a moment.

“Come back early in the morning, girlie,” said he. “The birds never sing until you get back.”

The full force of what her marriage meant to this fond old man suddenly swept over Christine, and it was well that the darkness hid her frightened eyes. She could not speak, for to speak would have been only to lie; but she kissed him again—this time with a fervor which, in the light of after events, haunted Elias’s memory for months; and came to him in the long watches of the night as the recollection of water comes to the famished wanderer in the desert.

At the Singleton cottage, anxiously pacing the walk, Colfax waited with horse and buggy. The greeting between the lovers, restrained though it was by the presence of a third party, gave Diana a momentary pang. They were so much to each other—so much more than any man could ever be to her or she to him! Then Christine handed her parcel to Colfax and said good-by to

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Diana. They expected to see each other in the morning, at the Lincoln House, where Colfax and his bride would stay temporarily. But separations are seldom measurable in mere terms of time and space, and the two women clung tightly to each other for a moment, cheek to cheek.

"Be as cheerful as you can, dear, before Norman," whispered Diana, with a full throat.

As Christine lifted her skirts to step into the buggy, light, rapid footfalls sounded on the board walk. The next moment the stately figure of Judith Flaster emerged from the gloom.

"Just in time, as usual!" she exclaimed, with a little shortness of breath, which she would have been loth to attribute to her flesh. "Now, Chris, I came to say just this: as long as you won't let either Di or me see you married, for fear of grandfather's wrath, I want you both to promise that as soon as you are man and wife you will come straight to our house instead of going to that miserable hotel. Your room is all ready, and you will be so much more comfortable and secluded there. Don't deny me this, please," she added, as Christine and Colfax exchanged glances.

"Only for the same reason, Judy dear," answered Christine. "We must not embroil any of the family with grandfather."

"I want to be embroiled," said Judith, emphatically. "It would be a prime thing for us all to be embroiled, for the sooner grandfather realizes that this match is approved by everybody except himself, the sooner he *will come to reason.*"

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But Christine only shook her head and gave Judith a kiss.

"I know you think that, Judy, and you are a darling. We are very grateful—just as grateful as if we could accept your hospitality. But it will be better for all of you to show your approval of the match after the event, when grandfather cannot accuse you of complicity, as I fear he will poor Di. Good-by."

The horse and rubber-tired buggy made little sound in the thick dust. It was a starlit night, but dark enough under the umbrageous roof which spanned the narrow street. A country lane could scarcely have been quieter. The first sign of life in two blocks was the bent figure of old Newton Humphreys, thumping the sidewalk loudly with his cane as he hobbled home to bed after his customary game of dominoes in Pond's harness-shop.

"If he knew where we were going, Norman, what do you suppose he would do?" asked Christine in a low voice.

"Post down town again at a double quick, in spite of his rheumatism, in order to be the first to tell the news."

At the next corner, where they turned west, toward Hunter, in which place they were to be married, they met Pinckney Singleton. Thanks to the arc-light, he recognized them, and took pains to let them know it by stopping and giving them a deliberate stare. He did not suspect their errand, of course; but he knew that Christine was out with Colfax against her grandfather's orders, and it was a pleasure to his small nature to catch

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some one in a clandestine act. A shade of annoyance passed over Colfax's face, and he cut Pinckney's surveillance short by touching the horse with the whip.

"You mustn't dislike him too much, dear, since you are soon to be cousins," murmured Christine.

"I shall try not to, sweetheart," he answered.

He slipped his arm about her, and she sank against his side. Weighty thoughts were running through the minds of both, and they did not speak again for some time.

"In some respects, Norman, I am doing an awful thing," said Chris, finally. "I am defying the conventions of society and breaking the traditions of our family. There has never been a runaway match before in our family, big as it is. It's a record that we women have all been proud of. Now I am to put a black mark on that white page."

"Do you think the mark is very black?" he asked, smiling.

"Ah, dear, don't ask me!" she murmured, dropping her cheek upon his shoulder. "I wonder if anything is black to a woman when it is proposed by the man she loves! But there are some people who will think it black."

"We could hardly hope to escape censure from some, whatever our course."

"I can't keep my mind off grandfather. Poor, dear old man! He loves me so!" Her voice failed her; but after a moment she added huskily: "Norman, I'm afraid it will break his heart. If it does, my happiness *will be gone* forever. I can never forgive myself. I

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shall always think that there might have been a better and an easier way. To-night he told me, the last thing, to come back early in the morning, because the birds never sang for him until I came. Now they will never sing for him any more."

She began to sob, softly. Colfax talked soothingly, and affected to believe that the chances of Major Hawley's forgiveness were good.

"I know just how badly you feel, Chris," he concluded. "To break a heart is a terrible thing; and when one breaks, some one has done wrong, sure. But in this case I am very certain that the wrong is not ours. It is your grandfather's. He did a wrong when he refused to accord you the rights of a woman and let you have the man of your choice; and the fact that he was actuated by love, does not alter the results."

"But when I think of all he has done for me, my act looks so selfish, even though I believe myself in the right."

"It is not selfish. All the favors he could heap upon you would not obligate you to waive a woman's first and greatest right—to let her hand go with her heart. Besides, when it comes to duty—though I don't like to speak of this part of it—you owe something to me as well as him. I haven't done as much yet for you as he has; but in the years to come, God helping me, I intend to do more. For a husband *can* do more for a woman than any one else. Further, if you had decided not to marry me, think how unhappy you would have been. Much more so than you are now, would you not?"



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"I am not unhappy now, Norman," she protested gently. "I couldn't be, with our wedding so near. I am just—grandfather's case seems so sad—don't you understand me, darling?" she ended, tremulously.

"Certainly I understand you," he answered reassuringly, "and I know that you are not really unhappy. You are just depressed a little, as I also am, by the gravity of the situation. But we shall have our reward. I wish I could tell you how much you mean to me, darling. You come to me as a precious trust, from the great Giver; and at the end of life I want to give you back to Him as spotless as when I received you. I want to clothe you, shelter you, feed you, and keep you robust and well, always ready to laugh or sing. But I also want to do vastly more than that. I want to uplift you. I want to be a daily inspiration to you, making you think more of humanity, drawing out the best that is in you, dwarfing you in no way, and developing you, as nearly as may be, into a perfect woman. I want to stand between you and all evil, keeping your eyes and ears free from all pollution, and your soul free from any callousing touch of the world. I want to be a rock for you in time of storm, and a refuge in time of trouble. I want to be and do all this for you, because that is just what you have been and done for me."

"That seems such great and undeserved praise for me, dear," said she solemnly, with glistening eyes.

Neither spoke again for some time. The horse trotted steadily along. No pebble or stone rang under his shoes, for pebbles and stones are scarce articles in *Pembroke County*. One of Christine's hands lay on

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Colfax's shoulder, under her cheek; the other he held.

"Norman," she began, hesitatingly, thinking of Judith's words, as they passed into a low, darksome bottom, with tall trees on either side, "do you think it would be possible for you ever to love me less than you do now?"

"Ask yourself that question about me, and your answer shall be my answer."

She smiled her content.

Half way to Hunter they passed a large farm house. The unusual illumination within, the sound of fiddles, and the number of vehicles in the barn-yard and along the fence, all indicated a festivity of some kind. Christine asked Colfax if he knew what it was.

"Kate Harrison was to be married to-night."

He wondered, as he spoke, if Chris would feel the contrast between this gay country rout and her own stolen, sober little wedding. Possibly she divined his thoughts for as she withdrew her eyes from the scene she said: "I don't envy Kate. Do you know why?"

He shook his head.

"Because she isn't getting the best man in the world, and I am."

It was half-past nine when they drew up at the little Methodist parsonage in Hunter. The church stood next door, and in the illusive starlight its spire—a mere wooden cone by day—seemed to pierce the studded vault above like the giant finger of Faith, pointing the way for humanity. While Colfax tied the horse, Christine's eyes followed the direction of the finger, up, up, through

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the dizzy, star-strewn waste, until her brain reeled and she laid her hand upon her lover's arm to steady herself.

"Norman," said she, as they passed through the gate, "I feel as if mother were looking down upon us to-night and approving of what we do."

"I am sure she is," said he.

Their coming was expected. The little parlor, with its funereal furniture in grim array, was already lighted. In the center of the room stood a marble-top table, bearing writing materials. A bowl of pansies on a little stand near the door cheerfully greeted the bride-elect as she entered. Not much else, though, was cheerful. The clandestine nature of the marriage seemed to have stunned the pious little household. The curtains were tightly drawn, and the little old minister received them with manifest trepidation, tiptoeing about like a footpad in showing them seats, and speaking in a burglarious undertone. Then stepping to an inner door, he solemnly raised his hand, as one might have signaled to an invisible executioner.

The next moment two tall, rigidly upright old ladies, as much alike as two peas and dressed in whistling black silks of a cut half a century old, with lavender ribbons at throat and wrists, stalked into the room. After their introduction, which showed them to be the little minister's wife and her maiden sister, each of them punctiliously backed away, stiffly deposited herself on the edge of a straight-backed horsehair chair, folded her hands in her lap, and dropped her eyes to the spotless flowered carpet.

This excessive formality, together with the air of

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secrecy which pervaded the place, annoyed Colfax. He glanced apprehensively at Christine to note the effect on her. She was in no merry mood, as he well knew; but out of the tail of her eye there issued a roguish appreciation of the situation. For it was plain that a runaway match in their parlor was quite the most desperate adventure which any of the simple trio at the parsonage had ever engaged in. The ladies, moreover, seemed determined to forestall any aloofness which the bride, as a member of the first family of the county, might show toward people in their humble station. When they discovered that no aloofness was felt, they relaxed perceptibly; and whenever they stole a glance at the sober but courageous bride, their eyes shone with that tenderly exultant light which has filled woman's eye, from the days of Mother Eve down, whenever love is crowned.

As he sat down to the little table to fill out the certificate, the Rev. Manley Hitchcock struggled hard to maintain a calm exterior; but the first thing he did was to overturn the ink. Fortunately for the carpet, he succeeded, with the aid of his handkerchief and a few blank marriage certificates, in confining the damaging flood to the top of the table until Mrs. Hitchcock came to his relief with a cloth. Beginning again, he misdated the first blank. On the second, he got the bride's answers into the groom's space. Each time he exclaimed "Tut, tut! Well, well!" But at last all was ready; the couple stood up and joined hands; Mrs. Hitchcock and her sister also courteously rose; and the minister began the simple ceremony.

A more radiant bride than Christine may have stood

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by many a man's side, but certainly none more chastely beautiful, more serenely spiritual. If marriages are made in heaven, as we are told, may we not also believe that there are times when the angels are constrained to wing their noiseless way to earth, and hover invisible above Love's altar, to see the sealing of the bond? If there were any such shining witnesses to the marriage in that little parlor, the pure, pale beauty of the bride and her low, love-rich voice as she pledged herself unto death, must have made them yearn to gather her to their guileless bosoms and claim her then and there for the heavenly host.

When the last fervent word of the prayer had been spoken, and the young wife had received her first conjugal kiss, she yielded her hand to the congratulatory grasp of the Rev. Hitchcock. But instead of taking Mrs. Hitchcock's hand, when it was proffered, Christine suddenly wound her arms about the old lady's neck. The spinster delicately turned away, and wiped a tear from under her spectacles. Mr. Hitchcock, beckoning the bridegroom to follow, slipped out into the hall with nervous haste.

"My son, our hearts go out to that motherless girl. You shall both have our prayers. I believe you have done the right thing. But seek a reconciliation with Major Hawley. Go to him at once and tell him what you have done. It will require manhood, but you have it, I am sure; and such an act will go far toward drawing the sting from this night's work."

After Colfax had slipped an envelope into the minister's hands, and the sisters had pinned a cluster of

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pansies on the bride's bosom, the newly-married pair drove off. For some minutes no word was spoken, no caress exchanged. They were both tasting the sweets of that restraint which follows the removal of the last barrier between enjoyment and its object.

"It is done," said Christine at last, in a low tone.

"Yes, it is done."

"I am yours, wholly yours, soul and body, for better or for worse, until death do us part," she repeated slowly.

"And I am yours."

She brought her earnest face closer and peered up into his eyes, as if to read his soul. He smiled, but her features did not relax. Her eyes merely filled with the love-light of the woman who has given all. Then she kissed his cheek.

"Say it again!" she murmured.

"And I am yours."

"Until death do us part!"

"Until death do us part."

Except for a dim light in the hall, the Lincoln House was wrapped in darkness when Mr. and Mrs. Colfax drove up to the limestone horseblock. Their quarters consisted of two rooms on the first floor, just across the hall from the office. Their front room, in fact, was the hotel parlor. But in order to accommodate his good friend Norman Colfax, Horace Waterbury was willing to make shift for a few weeks without a parlor.

Norman had just snapped on the electric light when there came a guarded knock at the door. Christine started, but Colfax at once opened the door. At first

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he saw no one, though he glanced up and down the hall; then—

“Is that you, Norm?” came a hoarse whisper.

Thrust cautiously forth from a recess under the stairway was a round, bullet head, thinly thatched with red hair and set with a pair of little gray eyes above bulging cheeks, like marbles sunk in putty. Recognizing his landlord, Colfax stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind him, whereupon the head emerged from its hiding-place, followed by a roly-poly body clad in a striped nightshirt. Waddling forward in his bare feet, Mr. Waterbury grinned expansively, showing a missing front tooth. At the same time he extended a fat hand.

“Congratulations, Norm!” said he in a wheezy undertone, as if afraid the bride might overhear. “I heerd you drive up. I slid back there arfter I knocked because I thought Chris might open the door. I didn’t want to scare her to death. I’d have dressed, but I thought you wouldn’t need nothin’ to-night.”

“We don’t, Horace.”

“You got the girl, did you?” asked the landlord with a twinkle.

“Don’t I usually get what I go after?” Colfax smiled genially.

Horace chuckled. “By Godfrey, I’d give twenty dollars to see old Maje Hawley storm when he hears the news. You’re a nervy devil, Norm! When you goin’ to tell him?”

“In the morning.”

“By phone?”

“No, in person.”

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"Good Lord! Is your life insured? You ought to make some provision for your widow. He'll bust loose like a cyclone. Take my advice, Norm, and touch him off by phone first; then go out afterward, when he's blowed off a while—if you are bound to go." For a moment he fixed his blinking eyes upon the young man in unconcealed admiration. Horace himself had never had the nerve to pop the question, much less beard some grizzly old sire in his den. "I come down to tell you that I'm goin' to serve your breakfast in your rooms in the morning, and try to git you up a little something extry. You kin call it my weddin' present. You never give me no chance to send any other kind. It will be pleasanter for *her*—breakfast in there. Milly will wait on you, and she'll keep her mouth shut."

"That's very thoughtful, Horace. You will win Mrs. Colfax's heart the first stroke."

"*Missus Colfax!*" chuckled Horace, giving Norman a playful dig in the ribs. "Lord, Norm, you don't expect me to call her Missus, do you?"

"No. I was just practising a little on the word."

"I reckon you won't need much practise. What time will you have breakfast? Not very early, will you?"

"Yes. Not later than seven o'clock. I want to get out to the Hermitage before the Major starts on his round."

"What was it, dear?" asked Christine anxiously, when her husband returned.

"Only our landlord. We are to have breakfast in



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here to-morrow morning, and Horace promises that it shall be a good one—a regular wedding breakfast.”

“How kind of him!” she murmured gratefully.

“Now I must take the horse back to the stable. I shall be back in fifteen minutes. You are tired, sweetheart, and you needn’t wait up for me. Good-by—for a quarter of an hour!” And he kissed her.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE bride and groom sat down to breakfast a moment before the clock struck seven. An orange and a bowl of oatmeal, with an individual pitcher of fine rich cream, were served at each plate. A bowl of dahlias occupied the center of the table. In front of this was a large platter, bedded with parsley, upon which lay the golden-brown quarters of a young chicken, fried to a turn. Soft-boiled eggs, a dish of celery sprinkled with cracked ice, toast, rolls, waffles, and honey from Horace Waterbury's own farm, completed the bill of fare. A steaming silver coffee-pot, flanked by two translucent cups and saucers, sat at Christine's right. Colfax suspected that the china was borrowed. The regulation Lincoln House cup was a handleless affair, half an inch thick, and as unbreakable as an earthenware jar.

"Look, dear!" exclaimed Christine, laughing and pointing to the butter. It had been molded into two hearts, transfixed by a dart made from a stalk of celery.

Colfax smiled. "To truly symbolize our hearts, the two should have been made in one."

Christine threw him a happy glance. She looked very pretty and domestic as she poured the coffee. The rosy flush of sleep was still upon her cheek; there was a morning brightness in her eye, and the suggestion of a

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hasty toilet in her slightly tousled hair. Her clothes were the same that she had worn the night before, as she had no others with her; but Colfax was conscious of a difference—of a touch of *deshabille*, which seemed to delicately confess his new and intimate relation with her. He did not suspect that the effect was produced by so simple a trick as the leaving off of her collar and the turning in of her shirtwaist at the neck, in a V-shaped opening.

The waitress, after seeing that their wants were supplied, tactfully left them alone. A broad patch of sunlight lay on the carpet; a playful breeze fluttered in at the window and gently rattled the dry pods of a purple flowering-bean.

"I wish we could eat all our breakfasts in here, as long as we stay at the hotel," said Chris happily, as she passed his coffee.

"We can."

But she shook her head. "It would make a great deal of trouble for them. Besides, if we eat in the dining-room, our own little nest will seem all the snugger when we get into it."

"That won't be long—not over a month," said he, serving her plate. "I am going to give you a fore-quarter. They say that eating wings tends to make a woman angelic."

"You think I need them, then!" said she, reproachfully.

"Oh, no. But if wings will *make* a woman angelic, it stands to reason that they will do wonders for a woman *already* angelic."

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"A very lame apology!" she retorted.

They were very happy. Yet the impending interview with Major Hawley weighed heavily upon them both; and Colfax finished his breakfast in less than two minutes after Halleck's stable-boy had tied his saddle-horse to a post in front of the hotel.

"Be gentle with him, darling!" cautioned Christine, with distressed eyes. "Remember how it will hurt him."

"I will," he promised, taking her cheeks between his hands and kissing her.

"And be careful," she added, with a slight pallor. "It's a terrible thing to say, Norman, but I know his temper; and if he should lose control of himself—" Tears filled her eyes; but she dashed them away and smiled through the mist which still lingered. Then she kissed him once more and wished him good speed, with an injunction to hasten back. After he had gone, she threw herself across the bed and gave vent to her overcharged heart.

The oak and apple trees still wore the rusty, tattered remnants of their summer livery; but hickories, maples and elms were nearly bare, and their gorgeously colored leaves lay fetlock deep in many places on the road. As Colfax cantered briskly along, a brown thrasher, now voiceless and shy, flitted silently into a thicket—a mere ghost of the joyous bird which a few months before had filled earth and sky with his melody from some favorite treetop. The redbirds, too, were silent except for an insignificant, nervous *tsip-tsip*, which conveyed no hint of the birds' ringing notes of courtship days.

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Where the road wound through the woods, and the naked limbs from opposite sides dumbly caressed one another above the wayfarer's head, a spicy odor filled the air and mingled with the pungent breath of the pennyroyal.

As Colfax dismounted at the Hermitage, Mrs. Hawley appeared at the door in one of the cool, washable morning-gowns which, with her southern passion for summer, she always wore as late in the season as possible, and in which she could work among her flowers with no fear of dirt or dew. Colfax's expression may have been significant. Certainly his call was, especially at that early hour; and at sight of him Mrs. Hawley stopped short, as if forewarned of the impending shock, and laid one frail hand over her heart. Colfax yearned to give her some word of sympathy, but she gave him no chance to say anything. Even in this moment of dread forebodings, her loyalty to her husband as head of the house was paramount, and she said at once:

"The Major is in his study, Norman. He is just getting ready to ride."

She led the way down the wide hall, ushered Colfax into the study with a word to her husband, and closed the door. Then she moved noiselessly across the hall to her own room, forgetful of the trowel in her hand, and closed that door also. Apparently she dreaded to hear the sounds which might issue from the study.

Major Hawley, pipe in mouth, was seated at a table with his hat on and his riding-whip across his knees. At sight of Colfax he instantly ceased writing, laid down his pipe and hat, and stiffly rose, drawing his great

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bulk to its full height of six feet and two inches. No fine instinct like his wife's premonished him of the fateful words which had lately crossed his granddaughter's lips. Possibly he fancied that Colfax had come to ask for her hand. Anyhow, he advanced a step or two with a stern face; then pausing with his knuckles upon the table, he fixed upon Colfax the piercing eyes which had struck terror into more than one man's heart in the past.

"What is your business, sir?" he asked, not loudly, but in a voice of trumpet-like quality.

Colfax's heart was thumping, but he was not afraid. He and the old man had crossed swords before, though never on a battlefield like this; and as he spoke he instinctively leaned forward, as if to brace himself for the blast of a storm.

"I have come to tell you, Major Hawley, that Christine and I were married last night."

For a moment the old man moved not an eyelid, but stood as if fixed in marble. Fixed in petrification he was indeed. Then his expression slowly changed to dumb, piteous wonder and incredulity—such, one may fancy, as is felt by a fleeing stag when the hunter's mysterious ball crashes through his vitals. His face slowly paled; the knuckles upon which he leant blanched from pressure and communicated a slight trembling to the table; his throat worked convulsively, and his lips began to twitch. In short, senility seemed to have pounced upon him as suddenly as a panther pounces upon its prey.

"Are you jesting with me, sir?" he asked huskily.

"I should scarcely do that, Major Hawley."

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Elias dropped his eyes to the floor, and swayed visibly. Colfax, expecting to see him fall, moved a step nearer. But the old man was quickly himself again, and with recovery came the terrible rage of a wounded beast for the author of its misery. His great hands clenched in hard, hammer-like fists; his jaws set ferociously, and his eyes burned with fury. But he was no beast, although he suffered the rage of one. He struggled manfully with the demon of passion, as he had struggled all his life, and he conquered it. But though he spoke without anger, his voice was unnaturally, cruelly, soft and smooth.

"She is no longer a granddaughter of mine, Norman Colfax. You need feel no accountability to me, sir, for what befalls her at your hands. I disown her—I disinherit her. No granddaughter of mine, no woman who bears the name of Hawley, steals out at night, like a woman of the streets, to find herself a lover. She has deceived and betrayed me—lied to me like a Judas. She has forfeited her name and her place in the bosom of my family. I took her—I took her to my breast when her mother died, and now she has stung me like an asp. Beware, young man, that she doesn't sting you also. And deceive not yourself with her protestations of love, for she protested that she loved me."

The brutal words sickened Colfax. "Is that all you have to say, Major Hawley?" he asked, in a voice trembling with indignation.

"That is all—on this or any other subject—now or hereafter."

"I left Christine at the hotel, with a heavy heart

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over the pain she had been compelled to give you in order that she might do justice to herself and me. Is this the message," he asked with rising anger, "that you, a man, her grandfather, give to me to take to her, a woman who loves you and has done the best that she knows? "

"I have finished," answered Elias with the stoicism of an Indian. "Good-morning, sir."

"The time will come, Major Hawley, when remorse will tear your heart for these unnatural words."

"Good-morning, sir," repeated the old lion, with a gesture toward the door.

"Good-morning, Major Hawley," said Colfax. "But do not imagine that I am a vessel into which you can pour any such foul message as that. If you want to break Christine's heart, you will have to do it through some one else than her husband."

Major Hawley stood motionless by the table until Colfax left the room—until the hoof beats of his horse came through the open window—until they died away in the distance—until all the other noises of the world, it seemed, died away one by one and left him in the midst of a mighty silence, alone with his sorrow. Then a spasm of pain crossed his face, and another and another; the scanty tears of age trickled down his furrowed cheeks; and dropping heavily into his chair, he flung himself face down upon the table, with outstretched arms, and surrendered himself to a paroxysm of grief.

"Oh, my baby, my baby, what have you done!" he moaned.

In the appalling agony of a strong man prostrated,



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he crushed into mere wads the papers which fell into his blindly groping hands.

When Mrs. Hawley softly opened the door and entered, ten minutes later, he was sitting upright in his chair. The marks of grief were still upon his face, but he wore the flinty, obdurate look with which he had always met his foes, whether men or events, appetites or emotions.

"What was it, Elias?" she asked, although the question was scarcely necessary.

"Christine and Colfax are married," said he.

She sat down, with freely flowing tears, but did not speak. There was, indeed, little to say. To plead for the child's forgiveness would be useless now, she knew. Some time in the weary future forgiveness might come or it might not; but mere words would never hasten it. The years had taught her just where her strength and her weakness with her husband lay, and she was not the woman to forget her lessons.

"That young woman, whose name must never again be mentioned under my roof," said Elias at last, "will probably send for her clothes. Let her have them. They are hers by law." With which he rose and left the room.

Christine listened with a white face to Colfax's account. He did not tell her all, or the half of all; but he made perfectly plain the obduracy and bitterness of her grandfather, and the present hopelessness of a reconciliation.

"Neither you nor I, Christine, nor any agent of

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ours," he concluded firmly, "shall ever enter the big gate of the Hermitage again until Elias Hawley has sued for pardon for his words of this morning. I don't want you to send for your clothes. I don't want you ever again to wear a thread which his money has bought. We'll go to St. Louis this afternoon, and buy you everything you need, from shoes to hairpins. Then," he added, relaxing his severity and smiling, "you will in truth be wholly mine."

Christine wound her arms about his neck and looked up trustfully into his eyes. "You are right, lover. I will do whatever you say."

It thus came about that the "young woman" did not send to the Hermitage for her clothes. Hawley blood was Hawley blood whether it coursed through the herculean frame of the Major or the delicate form of his granddaughter. A week, a fortnight, a month dragged by—dragged as time had never dragged before with Major Hawley. Still the young woman did not send; and one day Elias slowly climbed the stairs, locked the door of Christine's room, and dropped the key into his capacious trouser-pocket. Nothing of Christine's was touched. Her clothing, pictures, keepsakes, jewelry, and all the trinkets dear to a woman's heart, were left to moth, rust and solitude. Her dog-cart and phaeton were pushed into a far corner of the carriage-house, and her pony felt the weight of harness no more.

To like a man meant, with Major Hawley, to throw your house open to him, to take him riding behind your fastest horses, grasp his hand in public places, lend him money—if he needed it—send him business, elect him to

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office, trumpet his virtues from the housetop, defend his every act with the indiscriminating valor of a clansman, and give him your daughter in marriage, if he wanted her—all of which was most lovable. To dislike a man meant with him—well, something most unlovable. Everybody knew that Major Hawley had long disliked Norman Colfax. Everybody now expected the Major to hate him, and to wreak that hatred as only a man of his social position, wealth and inexorable will could wreak it. Indeed, many people predicted that he would soon make Barnwell too hot a place for Colfax to live in.

These prophets doubtless underestimated a certain salamanderlike power of Colfax's for resisting heat of this particular kind. But, happily, he was not put to the test. Elias made no aggressive move, as time passed, but contented himself with ignoring the existence of Mr. and Mrs. Colfax. He never spoke their name or alluded to them in the remotest way; and it was understood by his friends and acquaintances that he did not wish to hear the name. His wishes were respected, as usual. The *Citizen* and the *Clarion*—one a Republican, the other a Democratic, paper—were dumb about the wedding. A non-partizan movement to make Colfax county judge at once died. The managers of Colfax's own party looked dubious when it was suggested that he run independently; and Nicholas Hume, the county boss, bitterly observed that he could never understand why a young man would ruin his prospects in life for a "piece of calico."

Yet the man who had dominated the politics of Southern Illinois for forty years, and had exercised the sway

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of a despot—albeit a benevolent one—in Pembroke County, governing by a nod or a frown—this man began to find himself at fault in the little matter of breaking a heart or two, even though one of them was his own. The ladies of the village called on Mrs. Colfax, after she was settled in her new home—and just as promptly as they had called upon Mrs. Charlie Flaster. Members of the Hawley family itself, in fact, took the lead in this; and Diana and Judith were at Christine's half the time while she was getting her house in order. Even Mrs. Hawley was driven to town by Billy oftener now than she had been for many years before; and Elias knew, though never a word was spoken, that her destination was the pretty Queen Anne cottage which Norman Colfax had bought for his bride.

This desertion, as he regarded it, by his own family, added to the bitterness in the lonely old man's heart. But proudly locking it all within, he pursued his outer life as if nothing had occurred. He rode to the fields in the morning, kept up his journal, read, collected his rents in the village, chatted and argued in the president's office at the bank, dropped into the court-house to keep his finger on the public pulse, greeted old acquaintances as jovially as ever, and carried them out to the Hermitage for dinner.

But it was all a tragic mockery. So far from nothing having changed, as he tried to make himself believe, everything had changed. It was not that the black servants often stopped their chatter now when he approached; or that Diana and Judith and the rest came less frequently to the Hermitage; or that there were

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no more gatherings of young people in the big parlor at night. He missed these things, to be sure. But what he missed vastly more was the light step on the stairs, the swish of skirts about the house, the peals of girlish laughter, the morning song—sweeter than any thrush's—the little hands in his, the warm lips the last thing at night and the first thing at breakfast. He missed her at the table, perhaps, more than anywhere else; and guests were brought out now rather to fill the great void which Christine had left than to satisfy Elias's hospitality.

Try as he would to blink the fact, something had gone out of him, and was daily going out of him. A great weight of loneliness and depression, against which his strength was but that of a child, was crushing him to earth—not to rise again. His grip on life was loosening. His age oppressed him as never before. Senility advanced upon him in giant strides, and in fancy he already felt the chill of the grave. The charm had gone out of nature, and the relish out of his books. Even a good horse, for which he had always had the true Virginian's passion, no longer stirred his pulse. The saddle was getting irksome, and each day his turns afield grew shorter.

One day, however, he rode to the outermost bounds of the estate, with no other object than to look at a walnut tree under which Christine and he had once eaten a basket lunch together. It was now December; the fields were a dreary brown, with no life but an occasional vanishing flock of juncos and a few crows in the distance. The ground was soaked, water oozed from

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beneath Black Prince's hoofs at every step, and the naked trees were still dripping from an early morning rain.

As the Major drew up beneath the walnut, and called to memory that bright warm day, when all nature was aquiver with life and Christine's laughter rivaled the multitudinous melody of the birds, the change in the landscape seemed symbolical of the change which had come over his fortunes. Was this, then, the reward of his love and labor? Was this dismal end the goal of a long and active life? Peering into the Future, he drew a sigh of relief at the reflection that, in the inevitable course of nature, he would not have to travel far into that desolate waste; and for the first time on the journey of life, he began to yearn for that Inn where the way-farer finds perfect repose, and food and drink that banish hunger and thirst forevermore.

Broken sleep came first, and then insomnia. Ah, those interminable, haunted, maddening, sleepless hours of the night! Those hours when his mind groped in a topsy-turvy world; when the commonest facts and objects took on strange, distorted shapes; when the relations of life lost all proportion; and his will became as a child's, making him start and tremble at every sound! No wonder the flesh beneath his eyes began to sag in heavy, purplish folds, and his strong hands to shake as he carved the roast or fowl at table. Mrs. Hawley scanned his face anew each morning, as if to note the ravages of the night; and the despair in her bosom, which at first had alternated with hope, became constant.

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She had reasoned with her husband, but in vain. Senator Hawley had stopped over a day in Barnwell, on his way to Washington, and had spent most of the time in laboring with his brother. But the rare love and sympathy which had subsisted between them for nearly eighty years was ineffectual now. Elias only shook his head.

One night, after fighting with the demon of sleeplessness until his reason seemed about to totter, the Major arose, dressed, and stepped out into the yard. Trees and shrubbery slept in the moonlight, and the landscape was as still and peaceful as it might have been on the first night of creation, before sin or sorrow had been born into the world.

Elias stood for some moments with his hand upon the bole of a favorite elm, inhaling deep drafts of the soothing air. While in this attitude, he heard a sound behind him. Turning quickly—for his nerves were not what they had once been—he saw Christine's pony emerge from a clump of lilacs and advance in a friendly way. She had missed her human companions of late, since being released from service, which may have urged her to escape from the stable yard; and it was doubtless in a spirit of reunion that she thrust her soft nose into the Major's face, and looked inquiringly at him out of her limpid eyes. Elias stood motionless for a moment; then, with a sound between a sob and a moan, he placed his arm about the pet animal's neck.

Returning to the house, he softly ascended the stairs—for the first time in weeks—and unlocked Christine's door. The moonbeams lay in broad bands upon the

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floor, filling the room with a mild radiance. The bed must have been yellow with accumulated dust, but in the illusive light it looked as pure and white as the girlish form which had so often reposed upon it. A pair of walking shoes lay on the floor, just where Christine had dropped them on that last evening of her maidenhood, to put on something fitter for a bride. Elias had gone with her to buy those shoes just a few days before they burned the leaves, and he remembered now that she had asked for something heavy. Heavy! Through the gathering mist in his eyes, the shoes looked like fairy sandals; and, stooping, he fondly, blindly caressed them with his hands.

The mirror of Christine's dressing-table might have reflected her face but a moment before. In front of it lay a bit of powdered chamois-skin, yet shaped to her fingers. Near by was a handkerchief—a filmy, lace-edged square of white, discarded by her as soiled, perhaps, but still spotless to the eye. A crumpled neck-ribbon lay on the floor, where she had doubtless dropped it in her tremulous haste. The old man picked it up, pressed it to his lips, and then held it to his bosom, as if to assuage the ceaseless ache there. Finally, his heart overflowing, he knelt beside the bed, buried his face in the coverlid, and clasped his white head in his hands. It might have been Christine's grave by which he knelt, and grief convulsed him until his broad shoulders shook.

A vision he had in that moment—the vision of an angel in glistening apparel, pointing the way out of the horrid place of torment in which he had been groping



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for months. The name of the angel was Reconciliation, and the hand which pointed held, not the sword of vengeance, but an olive-branch. Elias paused in his grief, as it were. God knew that in his heart of hearts he had forgiven the child! God knew that he was dying for the breath of her lips! But his word, his pride! How could he renounce those? He swallowed spasmodically; and even in that moment, bowed over that sacred, abandoned bed, broken with grief, hasting toward the grave, and deserted by his own family, he still fought the inevitable with the appalling inflexibility of will which had characterized him as a child. A little more fire was needed—a little more burning of dross away.

Some days later, on turning Leffingwell's corner, Elias found himself almost face to face with Christine. It was the first time he had seen her since the night she kissed him good-by. But hungry as his eyes were for her familiar form, he allowed them to feed but a fraction of a second. In that point of time, though, there was photographed upon his brain, in unfading lines, a young woman in a stylish brown toque and a jacket trimmed with fur. She had changed—he realized it with a sickness of heart—and not for the worse. She was no longer his little girl. Clothing in which he had never seen her before had much to do with her alien appearance, no doubt; but she was also fleshier, and there was a poise, a matronliness about her that he had not expected to see.

He could not bring himself to pass her with averted eyes, therefore he would not pass her at all. With the blood thrumming at his temples, he stepped from the

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sidewalk and took a diagonal course across the street toward the court-house.

“*Grandfather!*”

He stopped, or thought he stopped, in the middle of the street. His ears sang, his eyes swam. Was it a trick of his disordered brain—that tender, supplicating word, floating to him like the disembodied notes of the first bluebird of spring? He could not be sure, for the same call had come to him in his dreams of late. But he waited—waited and prayed. Not only *he* waited, but, so it seemed to him, the people on the street, the horses at the hitching-rack, the sparrows in the trees, the clouds above, the whirling earth itself. But the call came no more; and as he stumbled against the court-house steps he realized that his feet had been carrying him along all the time, even while his senses paused. No wonder she had not called again, if she had called at all. He turned and looked after her. She was almost a block away, but it seemed to him that some of the spring had gone out of her step.

## CHAPTER XVIII

SOME of the spring had, in fact, gone out of Christine's step. Some of the joy had also gone out of her eyes over the prospect of getting up a nice little dinner for Norman and an old university classmate of his. As she slipped out of her street clothes, to go down into the kitchen, she cried a little. She would have liked to sit down and have a good cry, but time pressed. So with a touch or two of her powder-rag to her lids, she removed any trace of tears that Estelle might spy; and as she kneaded her pie dough a few minutes later, with her plump arms bare to the elbow, she actually laughed at the chatty mulatto's account of an encounter of hers with the milkman that morning.

Christine's separation from her grandfather naturally could not mean as much to her as it did to him. She had the elasticity of youth; he, the rigidity of age. For her, life stretched ahead like an enchanted highway, roseate with the light of love; for him, it lay behind in thickening gloom, dotted with the ashes of the dead campfires of the past. Time had, therefore, done much with her toward obliterating the harsher outlines of their rupture. During the first month or two she had been very unhappy. Her last thought at night and her first thought in the morning had been of the lonely old man who loved her above all things else in the world. These

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thoughts had embittered the honey of her love, had obtruded upon the sweetest moments of her marital communion, and made even her highest, holiest aspirations seem mean and selfish, as if bought with the price of another's blood.

But this condition could not last long in a healthy mind and body. Gradually she worked her bark from the eddies and shallows of the shore out into the full current of her new life. Unconsciously, one by one, the painful memories of the past had fallen away from her; and their place had been taken by interests, duties and ambitions of a novel and delightful kind. Her new relation to society manifested itself in an endless series of pleasurable and unforeseen consequences. Even such a simple thing as sweeping took on a new meaning; and the making of her toilet in the afternoon, that she might be sweet and attractive for Norman when he came home, acquired the significance, almost, of a religious rite. Day after day, as she sat before the cosy grate-fire in the sitting-room, and sewed or read or trifled with fancy-work, the fact that she was mistress of this home, that she had a husband, who would soon come briskly up the walk, impatient for a kiss, would flash over her like a revelation, and make her heart melt with an excess of joy.

Moreover, she became interested in her husband's professional work. She grew to understand, as never before, the intimate connection between his success and his happiness. In the past she had supposed, with the average woman's vague notion of such things, that a man's business—like the government's, in the average

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citizen's mind—would run itself. This error she speedily corrected; and she soon learned to tell from her husband's expression at night whether affairs at the office had gone right or wrong.

But they went right, for the most part; and an event took place soon after their marriage which gave their future a most rosy tinge and led to the building of a prodigious number of air-castles—against the time when they could procure more substantial material for their castles. A gentleman who panted a little from climbing the stairs and whose hand had the slight tremor of a veteran smoker, one day entered Colfax's office. In the three minutes—and no more—for which he asked, he explained that his object was to form a company for the manufacture of coke. The mine which he had in mind, not many miles south of Barnwell, could be had for one-third its original cost. The coal was excellent, producing a beautiful, high-grade coke at a minimum cost. The profits of the company, on a most conservative estimate, would not be less than thirty per cent., perhaps forty, and possibly fifty.

"That sounds like a fairy tale, Mr. Colfax, I know," concluded Captain Hand. "But I have papers here on which every item of expense has been figured, from the incorporation fee due the state of Illinois to the wages of a mule-driver. If you are interested and have a little money which you would like to quadruple in a few years, I should like to open my valise. Otherwise I shall waste no more of either your time or mine. But before you answer I will simply state that Mr. Pinckney Singleton of your town has taken ten shares of stock; Mr. Charles Flaster,

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cashier of your bank, twenty shares; Mr. Horace Flaster, president, fifty shares; Mr. E. C. Leffingwell, forty shares. These are all conservative business men, as I need not tell you—men with whom anybody would be glad to embark on an enterprise; and I come up here at the request of the senior Flaster.”

“Open your valise,” said Colfax, smiling.

Captain Hand did so, and talked for two solid hours. Colfax showed no impatience; and at the end of the interview asked for one day in which to make up his mind. Then he went over to see Horace Flaster.

“Yes, I subscribed five thousand,” answered the bank president. “If it had been my only five, I might have stayed out. On the other hand, I might have gone in even quicker than I did. It’s a rule of mine, as you know, never to advise any man as to an investment. But if you do go in with us, Norman, and *lose*,” he added with a twinkle, “you will have the consolation of being in better company than most men win in. That’s why I sent Hand up to you.”

After talking the matter over with his wife, and doing a good deal of independent thinking besides, Colfax decided to “go in.” In fact, by bedtime it would have taken some urging to keep him out. By selling certain securities, he could realize two thousand dollars. He could raise two thousand more by mortgaging his home. But familiar as he was, professionally, with the latter expedient, he hesitated to stake his and Christine’s little nest in any kind of a game, no matter how certain the winnings seemed.

Christine sat on the opposite side of the reading-

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table at the time, resting her cheek upon her hand, her thoughtful eyes fixed on his face, and the glow of the drop-light saturating the light brown coils of her hair. The thought of hazarding the roof over that beloved head seemed almost iniquitous. But, on the other hand, it would be for her sake—to make life happier, easier and fuller for her.

“Well, what do you say, dear?” he asked finally, after they had discussed the pros and cons of a mortgage.

“I say whatever you say, Norman. You know so much more about such things than I do. Yet, somehow, I shrink from the thought of a mortgage on our little home. That is because I am a woman, I suppose.”

“No. I feel much the same, and I am not a woman. We won’t mortgage it,” said he. “If the company wins, we ought to be satisfied with the returns on two thousand dollars; and if it doesn’t win, we shall be still happier to think that we didn’t go in any deeper.”

The decision relieved his mind. Chris came around and kissed him, so he knew that she too was pleased. Then he went to the cellar for some chestnuts, which they roasted in the grate, squatting on the rug like children.

But the next forenoon, when the Barnwell stockholders in the Eldorado Coal and Coking Company held an enthusiastic meeting in Pinckney Singleton’s office, presided over by Captain Hand, Colfax felt a pang to think that he had only a paltry two thousand in the promising enterprise. And when Horace Flaster announced that after further deliberation and investigation

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he had increased his subscription to one hundred shares, Colfax was half sick. It was hard to be left out in the cold in this way; and at noon, after some preliminary skirmishing with his conscience, he reopened the subject of the mortgage with his wife. Christine's blue eyes grew sober, but she answered:

"What I said last night, dear, was only dictated by my feelings. It wasn't a reason. Therefore, I can't allow it to stand in your way. If you think it best to mortgage the house, I shall be perfectly satisfied." Then, at the perplexity which still clouded his face, she added encouragingly: "If Mr. Flaster is so confident of success, I don't think we need be afraid. Nothing venture, nothing win. Nothing could happen, after all, which would touch our real wealth." The tenderness in her voice hinted what that real wealth was.

He kissed her for the pretty speech; and though he came to no conclusion before he left the house, she knew that the home would be mortgaged. But she was sure that she could be happier with a mortgage than he could be without one.

In less than four months the plant of the Eldorado company was in full blast; and one morning three of the Barnwell stockholders—Singleton, Charlie Flaster, and Colfax—together with their wives, boarded a Cairo & Northern train to take a look at their new property.

Ever since their association in this coking business, Pinckney had shown the greatest affability toward Colfax. To-day he drew the latter into a seat with him and imparted a plan whereby the Eldorado's earning capa-



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city—already amazing, on paper—could be doubled. Pinckney's brain teemed with wildcat schemes on every conceivable subject; and Colfax, listening politely, with his eyes on Diana's handsome profile across the aisle, felt sorry for her, for the thousandth time, for being chained to a man so much beneath her. Now and then Di shot an inquiring glance at Colfax, and he wondered if she weren't half ashamed of her husband's complete change of front toward him.

Pinckney, however, was undoubtedly sincere. He was just as poor a hater as he was a lover. No one prized his friendship or dreaded his enmity. When he finally gave Colfax the strongest evidence of confidence which lay in his power—namely, by asking him for a loan of ten dollars—Colfax promptly let him have the money, without weighing the probabilities of ever getting it back again. He took care that Diana should not see him slip the bill to Pinckney; yet he had scarcely sat down with her, after Singleton had gone forward to the smoker, before she asked:

“Did you lend Pinckney any money, Norman?”

“Yes,” said he, though tempted to evade her. “How did you find it out?”

“I have a way of finding out some things.”

“I suppose you want to repay it,” said he.

“I want to see that he does.”

“The same thing. I thought you were done paying his debts.”

“I have some shame left. How much was it, Norman?” she asked, appealingly.

“That I sha'n't tell you, Di. When I lend money,

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I assume all the risks. It wasn't much. But tell me how you found it out."

"I suspected it from the satisfied expression on his face. Then, I knew that he was in need of money."

Colfax studied the revolving panorama through the window for a moment.

"I have wondered, Di, if you will pardon me," said he, "where Pinckney got the money to buy stock in this enterprise. I know that his stock has been paid for."

"Getting money is always easy for him, it seems, except for the purpose of paying his debts." She gave a little laugh which was full of pain. "He is really a financial genius, in a way, and I am sometimes constrained to admire his exploits. But I don't know where he got this. He didn't see fit to tell me, and I didn't ask."

Pauline had been chasing up and down the coach, counting the seats, drinking ice-water most incontinently—her mother's back was toward the cooler—and speculating on the effect of a sudden pull at the bell-cord, which she calculated she could reach by standing on the arm of a seat. But putting this alluring temptation aside, she climbed into Colfax's lap. Her presence diverted the elders' conversation into other channels.

For two hours they jolted along over the unballasted track, with alternating views of forest and prairie, the latter just greening with winter wheat. The antiquated locomotive panted asthmatically up the steep grades, and then, to make up the time thus lost, coasted recklessly down the other side. A negro waving a bandana hand-

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kerchief at a cross-roads never failed to bring the train to a stop. At Variance, the conductor obligingly waited three minutes while a thirsty passenger slipped over to a saloon for a drink. At Lulu, a pretty young woman engaged the engineer in conversation for at least a minute after the conductor's signal to go ahead. The Cairo & Northern had to take the leavings of the older and larger roads. Therefore, the train nosed about from village to hamlet, and from hamlet to cross-roads, carefully avoiding the territory of its more lusty competitors, but now and then picking up a tidbit in the shape of some quiet old town which nestled sleepily under its elms and maples, and occasionally steaming into a junction-point with as much fuss as an overland flyer.

But it finally reached Grape Arbor, where Captain Hand, with two old-fashioned carriages, awaited them. A ride of seven miles brought them to their destination. To Christine, who had become infected with her husband's enthusiasm, the property was a distinct disappointment. The grimy topworks of the mine, which, to her inexperienced eyes, looked ready to collapse; the rusty, tattered, corrugated iron roofing of the engine-house and blacksmith-shop; the dingy little office, with window-lights passing into the first stage of opaqueness; the foul stream of water which flowed from the pump—all this was very different from the picture which her imagination had conjured up. Even the ovens, which were undeniably new, were squatty, unimposing things; and the mountain of slack, blotched with red patches from spontaneous combustion, was an ugly excrescence on the landscape.

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She was relieved, however, to see that Norman was well pleased; and at her complaint that everything looked so old and dirty, he only laughed, manlike. They were standing at the moment on the topworks, near the shaft; and every forty or fifty seconds, first on one side and then on the other, a car of coal would shoot up from the bowels of the earth, eight hundred feet below, and go rattling down an inclined track toward the chute.

"This dirty old thing, as you call it," said he, complacently, "is really an enchanted genie, which a good magician has given to us for a slave. What you take to be the puffing of an engine, is really his labored breathing; these cages are his two great hands, which he alternately thrusts down into the treasure-house of the earth; and that black stuff is really not coal but books and silk dresses and carriages and trips to Europe and nice things like that."

She threw him a happy glance, and gave his hand a secret squeeze. Then drawing her skirts closer about her, and gingerly shifting from one foot to the other on the gritty boards, she said: "If I had a slave that worked as faithfully as that, I'd give him a bath occasionally."

In pleasing contrast to the general dinginess, however, were two rows of new, freshly painted cottages, to which President Hand called the party's attention with some pride. The houses were as plain as dry-goods boxes, and as much alike as cubes of sugar. In their exposed position, without a square inch of shade, they would fairly smoke under the broiling sun of a South-

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ern Illinois summer. Yet they were clean and well lighted, and comfortable enough at this season.

"That looks like business—eh!" exclaimed Captain Hand with a flourish, halting the party at the proper distance to get the best effect. "Every one of them has a tenant, and when we get a few more ovens to going, we can afford to build a dozen more. They rent for seven-fifty a month, and they cost—Gentlemen," he added, lowering his voice, "what do you suppose they cost? Three hundred dollars apiece! And the taxes are—nothing! They are as good an investment as the mine itself. Yet we are not hogging it. The miners couldn't get as good a house as that in Eldorado for seven-fifty a month. Moreover, we give them their coal at ninety cents a ton—practically cost. When we get our store to going, we'll sell them groceries and dry goods at the lowest possible margin; and when our electric plant is installed, they can have electric lights for less than they pay now for kerosene."

Pinckney Singleton smiled sceptically at this programme of philanthropy. "Have you picked out a site yet for your high school and hospital?" he asked.

As Colfax and his wife sat by the small grate fire which the season still required, that night, talking over the events of the day, she asked:

"Who fixes the rent of those cottages, Norman?"

"The board of directors, I presume."

"Did it strike you that the company, to quote Captain Hand's own classical language against him, is hogging it? Seven dollars and a half a month on an

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investment of three hundred dollars is 30 per cent. a year. Is it right to take toll from those poor miners in that way?"

"Is it taking toll, in an ill sense, if we give them a fair return for their money?"

"No; but is it a fair return? Those houses are as good as could be rented in Eldorado for the same money, I suppose, just as Captain Hand claimed. But in Eldorado there are social and educational advantages, churches and stores. Those things ought to count, I should say, in estimating the returns a renter gets. Moreover, those same houses would cost more to build in Eldorado than at the mine, the lots would cost more, and taxes would be higher. I don't believe those cottages would yield more than 10 per cent. on the investment in Eldorado. Yet that would satisfy the average landlord. It would more than satisfy grandfather. He doesn't realize 5 per cent. on some of his houses."

"But look at the other side of it, my dear. We have about five thousand dollars invested in those cottages. We could have put that same money into the mine and ovens and made it earn 30 per cent. or more—assuming that our calculations are correct. But those miners and ovenmen had to have homes, and we had to build them. Now would it be reasonable to make any distinction between the money in the cottages and the money in the mine?"

"But there are thousands of people," she persisted, "who would have been willing to build those cottages as an investment, and rent them for half of what you are asking."

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"I doubt that," answered Colfax thoughtfully. "Of course, any man would be glad to make an investment which would yield him a certain return of 15 per cent. But to build those houses out there in the country would be a hazardous enterprise. If the company should fail and the mine shut down, the houses would be worthless. Where money is invested at a risk, it must be rewarded commensurately. That is a law of political economy. We, the company, are really taking the same risk that an outsider would be taking. Then, after all, taking toll from those miners, as you call it, is not radically different from selling coke to the public. Our dividends, like those of almost every other industry, ultimately come from men no better off than those miners."

"Then I think it a shame for the company to be making 30 or 40 per cent. off its mine," said she indignantly. "You are Shylocks."

He took her hand with a smile.

"As to that, the same principle applies to the mine as to the cottages. It's a hazardous business, in a way, especially this coking feature, which is only an experiment at the best. That is proved by the very fact that it promises such large returns. No perfectly safe business can pay dividends much if any above the average dividends of all other businesses; for the capital of the country, like water, seeks a level, and will instantly pour into any suddenly opened low place. Why does this enterprise promise so well? For one thing, because we got the mine at one-third its value. Why did we get the mine at one-third its value? Because its former owners

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lost money on it. It's possible for us to do the same thing. Therefore, to take that risk, we must be tempted with rewards larger than those offered by a perfectly safe business. Isn't that plain, Guardian Angel of the Poor? "

" Oh, I know that you wouldn't do anything unjust, dear," said she feelingly. " I couldn't love you as I do if I thought you would. But some of those women looked so wretched to-day that it has given me a heart-ache. I suppose they are foreigners, but they are human just the same. Did you notice that little baby in the yard of the first cottage? I think it must have been blind, it acted so strangely. Poor little dear! And those houses will be *so* hot this summer! "

She rose and went over to his lap, giving her loose light-blue gown a little hitch at the knees before sitting down.

" Husband mine," said she softly, laying her hands upon his shoulders, " I have something to tell you."

He slipped his arm about her waist. She did not speak at once, but laid her face against his neck, where he could feel the pulsation of her breath. Then placing her lips to his ears, she murmured something tender and low.

From that moment she became a holier thing to him, a vessel consecrated by God, and no whit less sacred than the virgin who gave, as the first fruit of her womb, a new era to humanity. Christine had mothered Colfax time and again, in her pretty young wife's way, when he was weary or things had gone wrong at the office. But now that real maternity was promised her, she



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looked more like a child to him, as she lay in his arms, than a mother. And as his mind leaped forward to the future, with its momentous responsibilities for her, and the travail of soul as well as of body, a divine pity suffused him. Yet he knew that he had no right to pity her—for was she not a queen, advancing to her coronation? He smiled down into her sober, uplifted eyes.

“I am so glad, my darling.”

For a moment she silently twisted the topmost button of his waistcoat.

“You said once,” she went on soberly, “just after we were married, that you thought a baby, if it came early, sometimes diverted a woman’s affections from her—you said you thought a young couple ought to have time to get acquainted—” She paused doubtfully.

“What did I say once? Some foolishness, I’ll warrant.”

“If you don’t remember, I don’t think I shall tell you.”

“A man can’t remember all the pretty things he says to his wife just after marriage. Tell me!”

“I didn’t say this was pretty, and I sha’n’t tell you.” She was smiling now.

“If it wasn’t pretty, I take it all back,” said he, kissing her. “Besides, whatever I said along that line was before the fact. The fact makes a great difference—greater than I could have believed.”

She gave him a tender glance, and slipped her hand into his.

“It’s foolish, dear, I know, but that little blind baby has haunted me ever since I saw it. It stood so

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still, with its eyes fixed straight ahead, and its body in such a tense, strained attitude, as if it were trying so hard to find out what was going on about it."

"You mustn't let your mind run on such sad things," said he soothingly. "The child may not be blind, after all. The next time I'm down there, I shall find out all about it; and if we can do anything for it, we will."

"You are a good boy!" said she, with luminous eyes.

## CHAPTER XVIII

AT the end of the first month, the Eldorado Coal and Coking Company's net earnings were \$40.72. But this was not discouraging, as Captain Hand pointed out in a circular letter to the stockholders. Owing to the arbitrary charges, a certain amount of coal—estimated at three hundred tons—had to be taken out each day before receipts balanced expenditures. After this limit was passed, earnings would accumulate in a rapidly increasing ratio: 400 tons, \$40 a day (estimated); 500 tons, \$100; 600 tons, \$280. The letter failed to call attention to the fact that when the daily output fell below three hundred tons, the losses increased in an equally rapid ratio. And there had been a number of days when the output was less than one hundred tons.

It was a rather glum group of young men who canvassed these returns one evening, in Colfax's office. But when the elder Flaster arrived, and with trained celerity took in the figures at a glance, he said cheerfully: "Boys, I don't call that half bad. It really beats what I had expected for the first month. The machine's bearings are rough yet."

Colfax went home with a lighter heart after this. But the next month, when the new machine might reasonably have been expected to show less friction, there

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was a loss of two hundred dollars. Horace Flaster said nothing. The third month—loss two hundred and seventy-five dollars—he looked grave and observed, as he scratched his closely-cropped beard, that in his opinion there was “a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere.” The nigger, according to Captain Hand, was the unusually low price of anthracite—coke’s only competitor—which was being floated down the Ohio River to Cairo at a very low freight rate and laid in private bins in Southern Illinois and Missouri at \$5.50 a ton.

Two weeks later the Barnwell stockholders were summoned to the back room of the bank on urgent business. Captain Hand was there, looking little like the president of a prosperous corporation as he nervously wiped his gray mustache with a very dirty handkerchief and emitted a decided alcoholic aroma. He rose and announced that he had a proposition to make. This proposition, after thirty minutes of explanation and apology, turned out to be simply—*Sell*. It was evidently an inopportune time to launch a coking enterprise, he continued. It had cost more to produce coke than the experiments had led him to believe; the coal in their mine seemed ill adapted to coking, in spite of the former opinion of experts; the price of coke was off, and was likely to stay off for an indefinite length of time.

“But, gentlemen,” he concluded, “inasmuch as I got you into this thing, I’ll undertake to dispose of your stock at par value, if you think it best to sell.”

Most of the stockholders looked relieved at this last, but Horace Flaster said sharply: “All that may be true, Captain Hand; but it’s a very different story from what

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you told us seven months ago. For one, I think you were nearer right then than now. I think you are getting frightened too quickly, and it has warped your judgment. I am for holding on to the property. I believe that if it is managed right, it will make us money yet."

"It may, sir," answered Hand. "I hope it will—no one more sincerely. Those who want to stay in, can; but I am in no shape to do it myself."

"But if you put a big block of this stock—yours and others—on the market," argued the banker, "you'll lower the standing of our company, and scare the rest of the stockholders, and as good as wreck the property."

"I'll not put the stock on the market. I have a man in St. Louis who will buy the stock at par value up to forty thousand dollars, and no one be the wiser."

"He's welcome to mine, then," said Ed Leffingwell promptly. "Has he seen our books?" he asked with a grin.

"He has seen the property."

"The books are nothing," said Horace Flaster testily. "Men are getting rich to-day, in ten thousand places, where other men failed. I am inclined to think that that will be the history of this enterprise, if we get scared and sell. At the same time, I am free to confess that I don't care to stand under any avalanche like a big sale of stock; and if you fellows sell, I'll sell, too. Suppose your man fails you?"

"I'll sell your stock," repeated Hand confidently.

"Yes, but at what price and by what methods? And what will you do to the fellows that decide to stay in?"

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How will you take care of them? I have a reputation in this end of the state that I can't afford to smirch for any ten thousand dollars, or twice that amount. These other stockholders are my business associates, though I know few of them personally, and I won't have their throats cut."

"Honor is just as sweet to me, Mr. Flaster, as it is to you," retorted Hand, with some heat, "and there will be no throats cut. If I can't dispose of the stock represented here to-day, to this St. Louis party, quietly, at par value, and without the slightest damage to the remaining stock, I'll consult with you all before I make another move."

This was satisfactory. But in just twenty-four hours, Captain Hand was ready for that consultation. His St. Louis "party" had failed him. At this meeting, however, two scared and excited stockholders from Eldorado, Captain Hand's home, were also present, in addition to the Barnwell contingent. The panic was spreading, and it was plain that the Eldorado company was squatting on a volcano which might get into action at any moment. To keep the stockholders in line and continue operations, now seemed impossible; and as some of them would certainly attempt to sell individually, and thus precipitate a crash, unless some general plan of relief were adopted, it was decided that Hand should undertake to dispose of the total body of stock, at not less than eighty dollars a share. For this work he was to receive a commission of 1 per cent.

Horace Flaster and Colfax tarried on the bank steps, after the stormy meeting was over.

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"What do you think about it, Horace?" asked Colfax gravely.

"Will you give me ten dollars a share for my stock?" asked the banker with grim humor.

"Will you give *me* ten?"

"No, sir. I am desperately sorry, Norman, for my part in dragging you into this. I am sorrier still for that little wife of yours. She was about as enthusiastic, when I talked with her last, as a woman ever gets to be over money matters. But you know that my motives were good; and if it comes to the worst, remember that the bank will carry that mortgage of yours indefinitely. I can do that much. I wasn't exactly serious about that ten dollars a share, but I think we ought to be braced for the worst. One of our first mistakes was in putting Hand in charge, but we couldn't well do otherwise. Here comes Mrs. Flaster," he added, as a lady drove up in a surrey. "She'll comb my hair when she finds out about Eldorado. She told me to stay out. But, then, she tells me to stay out of everything. If I had always followed her advice, I'd still be clerking at fifty dollars a month."

Colfax returned to his office in a despondent mood. Some months before, when the Eldorado sun was apparently mounting swiftly to the zenith, he had subscribed for an elaborate work on Pleading and Practice, thirty-two volumes, at eight dollars a volume. Heretofore the long row of rich sheepskins, with their bright red labels, had gladdened his eye each time he entered his office; but to-day they made him sad. Then there was a sixty-dollar leather couch which he had let Martin

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Anson send up to the house, ostensibly for Christine to look at, but in reality to stay. Colfax groaned inwardly at the remembrance of this extravagance.

But it was thoughts of Christine's disappointment which sent his spirits down to zero. With a mistaken kindness common to young husbands—and old ones, too, for that matter—he had kept his wife in ignorance of the true state of affairs at the mine. She knew that no money had yet been made, but she was as hopeful as ever. At the supper-table it was Colfax's unenviable duty to give her at least an inkling of the truth. Therefore, after an elaborate review of the company's operations, during which he dropped an unfavorable figure here and there to pave the way for the revelation to follow, he wound up with:

"So in view of all this, we decided at the bank to-day that discretion was the better part of valor. In other words, we decided to sell."

Chris paused in her tea pouring, with the pot in the air. "And give it up altogether?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes."

"But why, dear?"

"Because it's too risky, as I have just been explaining."

"And will Mr. Flaster and all the others get out, too?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you can make more by selling out than by staying in?" She was thinking of the 40 per cent. dividends he had so often entertained her with,



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sometimes in the small hours of the night, after a protracted meeting of the stockholders, when she was, oh, so sleepy, but roused herself out of a sense of wifely duty, and did her best to comprehend differentials in freight rates, miners' scales, cutting entries, and so on.

"Yes. That is to say, to sell is the safer proposition. We sha'n't actually make anything. In fact, we shall lose a little."

"How much?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know exactly. Perhaps four or five hundred dollars." Then, his conscience pricking him, he added: "It may reach seven or eight hundred—possibly nine."

"Our loss alone?" she asked incredulously.

He nodded, with a smile, but winced inwardly.

"Norman, we'll send that couch back to Anson's tomorrow," said she conclusively.

He did not relish the idea, but recognized its justice and wisdom. After tea, they talked further. Little by little he drew the mask off the unsavory state of affairs at the mine until she realized that the eight or nine hundred dollars were irrecoverably lost. There he stopped for the present.

"Well, I am glad that you are out of it, dear," said she, with a sigh. "You might lose everything if you stayed in—though nine hundred dollars seems like a big sum to melt away so quickly. But if you don't want the stock because it isn't paying anything, I can't understand why any one else should want it, or how Captain Hand can dispose of it at even eighty dollars a share."

How, indeed! That was not a question which Colfax

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would have cared to put, in so many words, to Captain Hand, or to discuss with Horace Flaster. Business, like society, has its code of etiquette, framed with a delicate regard for the fine sensibilities of its devotees.

"The stock *will* pay—in time—probably. But we little fellows can't afford to wait for it; capitalists can. They can afford to build for the future. They frequently go into enterprises, like a great newspaper or magazine, which they know can't be put on to a paying basis under several years."

Nevertheless, it was an unpleasant theme to him—this selling of the stock. It was not by chance that Captain Hand had been entrusted with the sale. He had arts in this line which other men knew not. What those arts were, Colfax had not cared to inquire too closely—nor had Horace Flaster, either. Colfax knew they squared with the honesty of the stock exchange and the street; but would they square with that honesty with which a man retires to his closet to pray, or lays himself down to die?

He glanced across at Christine, from the murky depths of these reflections. The hand with which she propped her cheek looked white, frail and pure; and seemed prophetic, somehow, of the day when she should descend into that mysterious Vale of Travail, from which she would emerge—God willing—with the crown of maternity upon her brow.

"I am so sorry, lover boy," said she, rousing from her reverie. "I know how hard you worked for the money you have lost, and that you only wanted to increase it for my sake. But, believe me, dear, I prize

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the will a thousand times more than I should have prized the deed. And I am so glad that you and Mr. Flaster would not sacrifice the other stockholders in order to save yourselves—as Ed Leffingwell was willing to do. Dear, if I thought you were a man like him, amiable to everybody and good to his family, but ready to take every advantage which the law allows, I could not love you.”

## CHAPTER XIX

CAPTAIN HAND circled from St. Louis to Memphis—to Louisville—to Cincinnati—to Chicago—and back to St. Louis. He parceled the eight hundred shares of stock into three blocks, and to no one man did he offer more than one block, or hint that more than one block could be obtained for love or money. Yet no buyer was found, and when the Captain appeared in Barnwell for a breathing spell, his hair was a little longer, his nose a little redder, and his clothes a little shabbier.

The mine, meanwhile, ran spasmodically as orders dribbled in. But there were days at a time when not a wheel turned. It was during such a period of stagnation that Colfax, at Horace Flaster's suggestion, one day visited the property. He drove over from Grape Arbor as before, and tied his horse in the edge of the wood. A man in a miner's cap and greasy overalls sat on the edge of a bridge, fishing in the creek which skirted the place.

"How's sport?" asked Colfax amiably.

"I'm fishin' for food, not sport," answered the miner sullenly.

The hopeless, pallid face, denied its share of sunshine by the man's subterranean work, gave Colfax a pang; and he walked on up the slope in no cheerful mood. The ovens might have been the tombs of some

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curious, bygone race of mound-builders, so cold and lifeless were they. The smoke-stack at the mine stood out sharply against the pearly March sky, its top blurred by no trace of vapor. The engine-room was locked, and its corroded iron roof and walls looked even uglier and more ruinous than when wet with condensed steam. The blacksmith-shop was open for some reason, but the forge was dark, and the place deserted. The superintendent's office was shut, and its windows dingier than ever. One of the cages hung at the top of the shaft; the steel cable leading down to the other one was rigid and motionless. On the whole, it seemed to Colfax, as he studied the desolate scene, as if that amiable genie of which he had told Christine had fallen into a profound slumber, from which nothing less than a cataclysm could wake him.

A tiny stream of life, however, still trickled about the place. A burrow with a worn, moth-eaten coat—one of the little animals used below ground for hauling cars—was cropping the tender grass on the hillside, and that with a haste which rather pathetically suggested that he feared his stay in these elysian fields would be brief. Back of one of the cottages a man was spading in the little garden-plot, while his wife worked with a hoe. About half of the cottages seemed empty. The one in which Christine had seen the blind baby was still occupied, for the front door was open and a man lay on the bare floor just inside, apparently asleep.

Everything lay under a spell of sleep, seemingly. Down at the company's store the solitary clerk was stretched on a counter, with a bolt of calico under his head—asleep. A dog lay on the floor, near the stove—

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asleep. A yellow cat was huddled on a show-case—  
asleep. In the case was a stock of candies which, from  
their apparent age and hardness, might have been pick-  
axed from paleozoic rock. On the unwashed glass in  
the front of the case were the greasy tracks of little  
fingers, and, a few inches higher, little circular spots  
which seemed to have been made by closely-pressed noses.  
What expectant little ones, clasping their single penny,  
had stood there in fascinated indecision, while their eyes  
wandered among that mouth-watering array of “jaw-  
breakers,” chocolates, caramels, “bananas,” sugar-kisses  
and rock-candy!

Two weeks later there was a flurry in Barnwell  
among that select minority who held Eldorado stock.  
Captain Hand had telegraphed to Colfax that a “deal”  
was on at last, and asked that he and the elder Flaster  
run down to the mine in the morning. “Moral influence  
will be good,” the message had closed with. Horace  
Flaster was in St. Louis, and Charlie could not leave the  
bank in his father’s absence. Colfax doubted the value  
of the moral influence of either Leffingwell or Singleton,  
so he went alone.

On reaching the foot of the slope, he tied his horse  
to the same scrub-oak he had used on his last visit. But  
how different the scene! Smut-faced men were running  
about the ovens like ants around a dead beetle. Mine-  
cars, gaudy with a brand-new coat of paint, were rat-  
tling down the tramway; the drivers were hallooing and  
cracking their whips; coal was thundering down the  
chute. Swiftly and noiselessly, save for the abdominal

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cough of the engine, the cages shot out of the dark hole in the ground, discharged their loads, and dropped down again. From the smoke-stack poured a dense, black smudge, which drifted off across the country in a funnel-shaped cloud. From the blacksmith-shop came the glow of the forge and the merry anvil chorus.

The buildings, like the cars, glistened with red paint—not yet dry, and bearing evidence of being hastily applied, but working a transformation. The windows of the superintendent's office had been washed, and a glass of hyacinths sat on the desk within. The spell of sleep at the store had been broken; and the clerk, aided by an assistant hired the day before in Eldorado, bustled around in his shirt-sleeves, waiting on the half dozen women who stood about with the company's blue credit-slips in their hands.

For a moment even Colfax himself was deceived, and fancied that the company must have got a new lease of life in some miraculous way. Then he smiled, and recognized in the new paint and general activity only another phase of that "moral influence" which he had been invited down to strengthen. But it was not a cheerful smile.

A husky young fellow who was wheeling coal to the furnaces, whistling loudly, informed Colfax that Captain Hand and a party of strangers had arrived an hour before, and were then down in the mine. In corroboration, he pointed out two carriages some forty rods distant, with the horses hitched to a stake-and-rider fence.

"When did the mine start up?" asked Colfax.

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"Yesterday morning."

Half an hour later one of the cages came up at reduced speed, with eight men instead of a car of coal on its platform. Their caps, overalls and jumpers made them look like a shift of miners; but when they had removed their outer garments and washed at a tub in the blacksmith-shop, they turned out to be Captain Hand, Superintendent Moses, Pinckney Singleton—to Colfax's surprise and not unmixed pleasure—a director from Eldorado, and four well-dressed strangers.

With perfect gravity Captain Hand presented Colfax to the strangers as the company's legal adviser, although it was the first Colfax had heard of it. He was conscious of becoming the focal point of four pairs of well-bred but keen eyes, as if the owners considered him a part of the property they were asked to buy. In a sense, Colfax felt a part of it; for these men's opinion of his and the other stockholders' intelligence and honesty would appear in the sum of their impressions of the plant. At about the same instant he saw a drop of the fresh paint fall from the eaves of the blacksmith-shop. He wondered if he were blushing.

Captain Hand passed around the cigars, and in the glow of geniality which followed he managed to draw Colfax aside. He was laboring under some excitement—partly alcoholic, Colfax's nose informed him—and he took two or three deep, fierce pulls at his cigar before speaking.

"That little fellow in spectacles is your meat, Mr. Colfax. I want you to stay with him. He don't say much, but he knows more about mines than the other



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three put together, and it will be his word that goes when they come to decide. I want you to go over to Eldorado with us for dinner, and I want you to take him in your buggy. You'll find something besides the weather to talk about, I hope. This is our last chance. If we lose now, we're gone. If you had been with me on my trips and seen the turn-downs I got, and the way I had to beg for a two-minutes' talk, you'd realize better what it means to have four men on the ground, favorably inclined, and any one of them able to draw a check for the value of the plant."

"Have they seen the books yet?" asked Colfax.

"Yea. They're not pretty, them books, and I could see they didn't like 'em. But they've got sense enough to know that if the plant had been making money, it wouldn't be for sale at eighty cents on the dollar. And day before yesterday, while I was in Chicago corralling these fellows, the good Lord took a hand in the game. He sent us that," drawing a letter from his pocket. "It's an order for ten cars of coke a day, for thirty days. It was pleasant to be able to flash that on these people, and have the works a-hummin' when we got here. To get that order I had to shave the price to where we don't make a cent; but it's a godsend at that," he added, at Colfax's darkening face. "I don't relish this kind of thing any more than you do. But it's business. Not one of these men would hesitate to do the same thing, under the circumstances. My children's bread-and-butter is in the balance."

He emitted a cloud of smoke, and through it he eyed Colfax keenly, as if calculating just how far he

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could trust a man of such squeamishness in a delicate transaction like the one in hand.

"Now you take Mr. Underwood in tow—we mustn't stand here and talk any longer—and tell him just what you please," he continued, with a show of frankness. "I don't want you to lie. I wouldn't do that myself, and it don't pay in the long run. But you understand as well as I that until *all* business men agree to tell the whole truth, it's going to be hard sledding for the few who begin it. We Eldorado stockholders ain't in the best shape in the world to institute any reforms just now."

Following instructions, though with extreme reluctance, Colfax attached himself to Mr. Underwood and offered him a seat in his buggy. The little capitalist promptly accepted, and the pair soon separated from the others. Underwood apparently forgot all about the impending transaction. He sniffed luxuriously at the fresh air, gazed at the clouds through his thick lenses, commented on their beauty, and stooped once to pluck a snowdrop and stick it in his buttonhole. He scanned the cottages closely, but as a philanthropist rather than as a capitalist, Colfax fancied; for he asked about the drainage, expatiated pleasantly on the advantages of country life, and seemed to grieve over the fact that no shade trees had been set out—an assumption of permanence in the company which gave Colfax a twinge. He also stopped a dark-skinned, black-haired little girl and patted her on the head.

"An Italian, I fancy," said he, as they moved on. "Are many of your workmen foreigners?"

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"About half of them, I believe."

"You have a great opportunity here, Mr. Colfax. Your working people are free from the temptations of a large city, and have little intercourse, I fancy, with even the neighboring village. Their isolation naturally throws them into closer relations with you. They doubtless look up to you in a way that would be impossible under ordinary conditions. Yet it occurs to me that this isolation may be a source of danger as well. Monotony breeds discontent and stagnation. It would be a fine thing, for instance, if you could have a little church here. Doubtless there are preachers or priests in the neighborhood who would gladly come here once or twice a month. I believe, too, that a little library, with a few hundred dollars' worth of books in it, would be one of the very best investments that you could make. What rent do you charge your tenants, may I ask?"

"Seven and a half a month."

"Those cottages cost five hundred dollars apiece, I should say."

"Three hundred," answered Colfax, after a pause. "Labor and material are cheaper here than in the north."

Underwood paused, with his hands behind his back; and as Colfax glanced at the mild blue eyes, fixed benevolently on the scene before him, it was difficult for him to believe that here was a man ten times a millionaire. Yet it only confirmed Colfax's belief that the most irresistible combination in this world, even in the Temple of Mammon, is the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove.

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"In that case," said Underwood, quietly, "I should reduce the rent to five dollars—as a business policy, not out of philanthropy."

He seemed on the point of saying more, but his eyes fell at the moment on the blind child which had got so close to Christine's heart. It was standing in the center of the walk, bareheaded, motionless, with its wide open eyes turned squarely up to the sun, and a peculiar rapt expression on its face. Perhaps somewhere in the gloomy depths of those sightless orbs, sensation still feebly survived; and the dazzling flood of sunshine, which in a normal eye would have inflicted agony, here produced but a pleasurable glow, a mere hint and mockery of sight.

"Is that child blind?" asked Underwood abruptly.

"I think it is," answered Colfax. "I have noticed it before."

Underwood approached the little one with a reassuring word, and, squatting before it, took its hands in his, and peered into its vacant eyes for some time. The baby gravely submitted, but finally thrust out a little hand, quite instinctively, and felt Underwood's waistcoat over until it touched his watch-chain, around which the fingers at once closed.

"Congenital and hopeless!" murmured the capitalist, rising, after gently disengaging the little one's hand. As they walked on he added, earnestly: "I suppose I have read more treatises on blindness, probably, than any other layman in the world. I have a little girl who never saw the light of day, and I fear never will. Her mother is now in Europe with her, searching, as she

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has for years, for some magician who can open the windows of her baby's soul. I fear nothing less than a magician can do it. I can't tell you, Mr. Colfax, how thankfully, with what joy, I would give every dollar I have in this world to cure that babe of mine, and go to work to-morrow with my hands to earn her bread."

The incident seemed to depress him, and he scarcely spoke again until they were skimming along the dirt road toward Eldorado. It was a very forward season, and already the soil of a few sunny slopes was flowing from the mold-board of the plow, in noiseless, curling waves which scented the countryside. Bluebirds receded from post to post in front of them, foraging, but at the same time keeping an eye open for some snug cottage to which they might take their April brides. In one farm-yard a little plum-tree was snowy with bloom. It had not yet put out a single leaf, and like a woodland nymph fresh from her bath, it stood in naked loveliness, its blossoms glowing in the sunlight with a velvety, fleshlike tint. Nothing seemed to escape Underwood's spectacled eyes, and he gave an exclamation of delight.

"Do you think all the stockholders in your company would be willing to sell at a fair price?" he asked, a moment later. It was his first word on the business in hand.

"I am quite sure that they would," answered Colfax, although he was certain that Captain Hand would have frowned on this answer. He wanted to add: "At any price." But that would have been quixotic.

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"Mr. Hand—or Captain Hand, I notice you call him—wasn't sure. We shouldn't want to buy, of course, unless we could secure a controlling interest; and we should prefer to have all the stock—if we take any."

In the wash-room of the little hotel in Eldorado, Captain Hand was sousing his flushed face into a basin of water, splashing and blowing like a young sea-lion. Then, with streaming hands and chin, he groped his way to the roller-towel which Colfax was already revolving in search of a dry spot. After wiping his eyes and glancing cautiously about the bare little room, to make sure that they were alone, Hand leaned close to Colfax's ear.

"The sale is as good as made at eighty dollars a share!" said he, in a low, exultant tone. "You must have give Underwood a good stiff talk. I might as well tell you now, though, something that I didn't care to mention before. When we bought this property we got badly bit, and we've got to pass the bite along."

"What do you mean?" demanded Colfax, at the other's significant face.

"I mean that the vein that shaft is sunk in is nothing but a spur, and there ain't a year's work left on three sides of it right now."

For a moment the two men steadily eyed each other. Then, before Colfax could answer, Underwood stepped into the room in his gentle way, laid his spectacles on the shelf beneath a cracked mirror, and turned to one of the granite-iron wash-basins on a bench. In the

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absence of a faucet anywhere, he hesitated momentarily.

“Just fill it from that pail there with the gourd in it, Mr. Underwood,” said Captain Hand, with the graciousness of a good Samaritan. “Eldorado ain’t got around to water-works yet.”

## CHAPTER XX

COLFAX had an action in the County Court at four o'clock, and immediately after dinner he left for Grape Arbor, to catch the afternoon train to Barnwell. He was not sorry to get away from the closing scenes of the transaction. The atmosphere in Eldorado had suddenly grown oppressive to him, after that revelation in the wash-room. He cursed the wily Hand for this disclosure at the last moment, and at the same time he despised himself for wanting to profit by roguery without paying its wages—a guilty conscience.

The thought of losing his home had been bitter enough; but the cup which he now held to his lips contained dregs, if the first sip were a fair sample of its contents, like gall itself. Never before had honest poverty seemed such an honorable estate to him as in this moment, when he was fleeing from it. The rusty liveryman at Grape Arbor could not scrape together change for the two-dollar bill which Colfax tendered him, but he went off for it, whistling. He was happy, though poor. The conductor on the train had frayed sleeves and worn shoes, and five daughters at home to clothe and educate on his meager wage. Yet he sat down with Colfax and chatted cheerfully until the latter envied him.

All the way home Colfax experienced a peculiar



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detachment from himself, like one just roused from a sound sleep. He stood aloof, as it were, and observed himself. At the office Christine's photograph lay on his desk, but something kept him from touching it. He was not the Colfax to whom she had given it—not as good a man as that Colfax.

On the way to supper, he paused at his gate. In his childhood a refined home had been denied him; and from the time that woman first took hold of his thoughts he had dreamt of just such a home as he now possessed—simple, but lacking in no essential. Very dear it had been to him, with Christine as its queen; and thrice dear when it had seemed about to slip from his grasp. Now he had firm hold of it again, but the pleasure of possession was gone.

In the midst of these reflections, Christine threw open the front door and sprang down the walk to meet him.

“What luck, dear?” she asked eagerly.

“They'll buy all our stock at eighty dollars a share.”

She joined him, outwardly decorous, but squeezing his arm with both her hands; and as soon as they were in the house she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him ecstatically.

“I knew it—I knew it!” she cried. “I had faith! And yet—oh, darling, I was afraid, too. And now I'm so thankful. Sweetheart, what if we had lost our home!”

“What if we had?” he asked, with a puzzling lack of enthusiasm.

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“It would have broken my heart.”

The whole wretched story trembled on his lips, but his courage failed him. He knew that she would recoil from the chicanery and hypocrisy which Hand had practised, and perhaps from himself for his part in it. He knew that even at this late hour she would expect him to be true to himself, regardless of cost.

Just what being true to himself would mean, though, he could scarcely tell. It certainly would not permit him to profit by dishonesty. On the other hand, he could not force his conscientious scruples on his associates. He could not make them come up to his standards. Could he even, in strict justice, do anything which would jeopardize their interests? Moreover, he had more than himself, more even than Christine, to think of now; and he could almost hear a little voice coming faintly up out of the future, could almost see a little baby hand lifted in mute appeal against a heritage of poverty. The light which had shone from Christine's eyes, day after day, as she bent her shapely head over some little garment in her lap, had haunted him sweetly at his daily tasks, softening his heart and quickening his brain. How could he now snatch that song from her lips, or dull that shine in her eyes? He could not, and—setting his teeth fiercely—he would not.

But this was only the beginning of the battle. As he sat in his office the next morning, unfit for work, and waited for a message from Hand announcing that the trade was closed—yearning for it one moment, that his suspense might be over; dreading it the next, because the chance to be honest would be gone—his mind re-

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verted to the words of his old teacher, on the night of his high-school commencement:

“ You will find the world a different place from what you now imagine it. But if you ever conclude that there is less nobility, less purity, in the world than you now believe, pause to shed a tear; for that conclusion will mark the death in you of one of Heaven’s most precious gifts—faith in your fellowmen. That conclusion will be of the devil, not of God. For lives have been lived and are now being lived whose nobility and purity exceed anything that you can yet imagine. Without these lives, humanity would stagnate and die. Will you be of this leaven of the world, young man, young woman? It is not easy. Where one succeeds, a thousand fail. If you resolve to be only as good as your neighbor, you will fail. If the standards of society, even of the best society, are to be your guide, expect not the dove of peace to descend from Heaven, and the still small voice, ‘ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ There will be crises in your life when you will have no guide but your conscience. If you are untrue to that, go bury your dead ideals, take your place in the rank and file of humanity, and leave the best and highest work of God for some purer, stronger and holier man or woman than yourself.”

These glowing words had seared themselves upon Colfax’s youthful mind. They had sustained him often, and lifted him out of the mire of temptation. But to-day they only tortured him. He had not, to be sure, lived the life that he had dreamt of living, on that hot May night, in the crowded school-hall; but never before

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to-day had he wilfully, consciously violated his sacred creed. Hitherto, his path, like the average man's, had run along a comparative level; but he realized that his next step now would either lift him appreciably higher or drop him appreciably lower.

The world would take small note of either step. Should he, refusing to profit by iniquity, telegraph Hand not to sell his stock, most people would believe him only shrewder or less shrewd than his associates, not better or worse. The discerning few to whom his real motive would be plain would probably call him a Quixote, while there might possibly be two or three who would value his sacrifice at its true worth. On the other hand, if he did not send this telegram, if he allowed his stock to be sold along with the rest, most people would simply believe him lucky, not knavish; a few of the wiser ones would wink and call him sharp; while two or three, perhaps, might grieve over his fall.

And Christine? Would her face not brighten because her husband had been true to himself? Aye, surely. But would it not afterward darken over thoughts of his reckless venture, undertaken in the beginning against her advice? Would it not darken over their lost home? Would she not, in her secret heart, accuse him of injustice to the little visitor already on its way from the Mysterious Isles? Moreover—and this was the thought that stuck like a burr—the sacrifice of himself would not save Underwood and his colleagues. To save them, he would have to sacrifice his own colleagues—his friends and neighbors—as well as himself; and that was a responsibility which he dared not assume.

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He sat like a man on trial for his life. Indeed, he felt that he was on trial for a thing that was higher than life, that would last longer than life, and that was sweeter to honest men than life. The thought brought the moisture to his brow. It was nothing to him that other men would make the sale without a twinge of conscience. Even Horace Flaster, knowing all that Colfax knew, might make it. But if he did, it would only be because he knew no better; because lifelong abrasion with the commercial world had calloused him. For Horace Flaster would not do that which he *believed* to be wrong. And he, Norman Colfax, did believe this to be wrong.

But *would* Flaster make the sale, knowing all? Colfax had resolved to embarrass none of the other stockholders with his knowledge of the exhausted vein; but he now suddenly rose, hastened down the stairs, and crossed the street to the bank. He found the president in his room, and in five minutes had put him in possession of all his unsavory facts and harassing doubts. The relation between the two men had been very intimate. Flaster had always given Colfax the bank's legal business; the two had served together in the Common Council—one as mayor, the other as alderman—and had always supported each other in the moral and material betterment of the village. Yet Flaster was of a peculiarly reticent disposition when it came to giving advice. He meddled with no man's business, politics or religion. "Hands off" and "Every man his own doctor" were his rather cold-blooded maxims. He never allowed himself to be surprised, and as he listened to Colfax's revelation

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about the mine and his conscientious scruples about the sale, his face was inscrutable.

"It's up to you, Norman, of course," he said, after a moment's silence. "But if you don't sell, do you understand that it means ruin?"

"I do."

"I think Hand has probably exaggerated that story about the vein being exhausted. But even if he hasn't, Underwood and his crowd will slip out without losing much hide—of which they have much more than either you or I. They are accustomed to tight places. But they won't take care of *you*. They'll give you no credit for refusing to sell. That kind of an act would be unintelligible to them. They'll think you stayed in to tie yourself to their coat-tails. If you are in doubt as to what to do, why can't you be guided by my action? You don't believe me dishonest?"

"No, Horace, I don't. If you believed this trade dishonest, you would refuse to make it. I don't want to do less, and I *do* believe it dishonest."

"Norman," said the president slowly and half regretfully, "business has an ethics of its own—rightly or wrongly, I don't say. If you play the game, you must accept the rules. They are as fair for one side as for the other. If you don't accept them, you will go broke. What you have to take, you mustn't be too squeamish to give. You had to take that exhausted vein; you ought to be willing to pass it on. It's a rough game, at times, I'll admit; and the older I get the less relish I have for playing it. But as long as I'm in it, I'll abide by the rules. I *must*. I have a family to support. So have you."

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Colfax winced and rose with a bitter smile.

"If everybody accepted the world just as he found it, Horace, and assumed, as you seem to, that he could do nothing to make it better, a hundred years would put us back in savagery. Nay, we should never have risen out of savagery. If business has an ethics of its own, so, then, have piracy and highway robbery. Man's a unit, and if he's rotten on one side, you may be sure the rottenness will soon spread to the other. You wouldn't pass on a counterfeit dollar that you had taken in, or trade off a wind-broken horse as a sound one. You have got past that point. You leave *that* kind of business, with its ethics of its own, for such rascals as Dick Nelson. Neither would you sell a worthless coal-mine, I am convinced, if the moral issues were not obscured by the complexity of the transaction. And I shall not."

He paused a moment, as if waiting for a final word. Flaster gazed out of the window in his inscrutable way. Once he opened his lips, as if to speak, but did not. Yet as Colfax passed out, the banker gave him a sorrowful glance. But whether the sorrow was for Colfax or for himself, no one but himself knew.

On Leffingwell's corner, Colfax passed Major Hawley—without any sign of recognition from either, of course. Colfax had heard ugly stories of the old man's grief, but the Major still held his head as high as ever. This meeting made Colfax's duty harder, in some subtle way; and as he ascended his office stairs a cloud of sickening doubts, let loose by Horace Flaster's smooth sophistry, settled upon him like foul birds. Neverthe-

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less, he walked to the telephone, called up the telegraph-office, and dictated a message to Captain Hand, declining to sell his stock. Then, weary beyond expression, he sank into a chair.

"Now go to work, pauper," he said grimly to himself.

He soon started home to tell his wife, and get that burden off his heart. As he approached the house it seemed already to wear an alien air, for he had decided to let it go to satisfy the mortgage rather than be saddled with a burden of debt for he knew not how many years. Moreover, he rebelled at the thought of accepting Horace Flaster's offer to carry the mortgage indefinitely. After his last interview with Flaster that offer seemed too much like a buffer between himself and the consequences of his honesty. It seemed manlier to suffer the results of his act.

As he opened the door he heard Christine's voice in a high, excited key at the telephone. At sight of her husband she snapped the receiver back on the hook and hurried forward with the familiar Western Union envelope in her hand.

"Oh, sweetheart!" she burst out, "I have just been trying to get you at the office. Here's a telegram from Mr. Hand. All your work has been undone, and everything is lost! But, darling, don't grieve! We have each other yet, and I am so thankful for that."

She looked up in his face with shining, sympathetic eyes—eyes that would have almost recompensed him for any earthly loss. He slipped his arm about her, and glanced at the message.



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*"Deal is off. Parties refuse to buy at any price. Have shut down mine. Details in person to-morrow."*

Christine clung to him closely, shivering a little for the effect of the message upon him. He let the yellow slip of paper flutter to the floor, and calmly pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

"We are poor now," said he, with a sad smile.

"No, no! We are rich, very, very rich. Our real wealth isn't touched—as I told you before. I wanted so badly to keep our little home, because so much has happened here that can never happen again, anywhere else; and last night, when I thought the danger past, I felt as if I couldn't give it up. But I don't feel that way now. Some day we'll have another home, and that will be *ours*. This one was yours, you know." She lifted a mischievous face. "Will you let me use *my* money, now?"

"How much money have you?"

"About three hundred dollars."

"Do you want to use it very badly?"

"Very, very badly."

"Then you may."

He had no sooner left the house, after dinner, to counsel with the other stockholders, than Christine hastened to the telephone.

"Hello! One forty-eight, please. Hello! Is this you, Lena? Have you cut into that foulard silk for my new dress yet? . . . No? . . . Well, don't then, until I see you again. I have changed my mind about it. . . . No, the pattern is all right, but

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I don't know that I'll have the dress made up at all, now. Something has come up which has very materially altered all our plans. I'll tell you more about it when I see you. Good-by!"

## CHAPTER XXI

THE winter had passed with leaden feet for Elias Hawley—a succession of freezes and thaws, days of caressing sunshine alternating with sullen rains from dawn to dark, when the mud grew hub deep, and the drowned land gasped for breath.

In an idle moment, at the beginning of the summer before, Christine had stuck a sunflower seed into the ground, near her grandfather's study window. The sturdy plant had reared itself twelve feet high or more, spreading its broad leaves to the rain and the dew, and proudly lifting its great yellow flowers to the kiss of the morning sun. All summer long it had flourished, as sturdy as an oak in its way, and fearing neither wind nor drouth. But in the fall the heavy central head, obeying Nature's universal law, began to droop; its yellow crown faded and fell away; hungry titmice and redbirds robbed it of its seeds. With the frosts and beating rains, the leaves gave up the struggle for life, and became mere limp, ragged mummies of their former lusty selves. One by one they rotted and crumbled away; and at last only the black naked stalk, with its empty head sagging low, was left. But it was not until the 15th of January that this was one night laid low by a gale.

A sense of kinship with the plant had sprung up in

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Elias's heart, after Christine's departure. Its gradual decay seemed to symbolize his own darkening life and failing powers, and each day he pensively noted the inroads of time upon its tough frame. The morning he found it down, snapped off at the roots, water-soaked, and splashed with mud, a profound despondency settled over him, and the old ache in his heart grew sharper.

"How are the mighty fallen!" he murmured sadly. "I shall soon follow you, sunflower, and give back to the earth the dust which I have used less worthily than you."

The big snow of the year—and the biggest in twenty years—began on the 2d of February. No sun appeared in the morning. All day a weird gray pall was stretched from horizon to horizon. An ominous quiet brooded over the earth, through which the restless lowing of the cattle came with startling distinctness. The redbirds, with sharp, uneasy *tsip-tships*, gathered in the pines about the house, as if instinctively seeking the protection of man. The jays, with their raucous throats for once stilled, fluttered noiselessly about the elms and wild-cherries, pressing their bodies close to the cold trunks, and cocking their pretty tufted heads from side to side, as if searching for some snug retreat. Even a flock of waxwings, which seldom came nearer than the orchard, took up quarters in the garden.

The first flakes fell about three o'clock—little inconsequential things which were at once lost in the mat of brown grass. But before Billy had finished carrying in his wood, of which the Major ordered an extra supply, his cap and shoulders were white. By dark, which came

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an hour earlier than usual, a wolfish, northwest gale, whose teeth were tipped with arctic cold, was ravening across the prairie. When Major Hawley opened the door to let out old Sherman, who had been loitering in the hope of being invited to supper in the kitchen, the wind sucked and roared until the library lamp flickered, and a cloud of fine snow burst into the room.

"You'll have to stay all night, Jube," said the Major, closing the door at once. "This gale would set every joint in your body to aching in three minutes."

Billy built a fire—not without secret grumblings—in one of the servants' rooms for Jubilee; and after the Major had had his own supper, he sent to the kitchen for the old darky again. Jubilee was not the company he had once been for Elias, for the black man had failed much faster than his master; but Elias still loved to have him about, especially since Christine had been lost to him. Jubilee was the Major's single living reminder of a distant past, when a little white boy and a little black boy—one the master, the other the slave, in name, but in practice equals—had lain on their backs on the bank of the Blackwater, during the long summer afternoons, and watched the wheeling turkey-buzzards far above; or had gathered persimmons and walnuts together in the fall, or stolen away to join the darkies of the "quarters" in a coon hunt. The old black's childlike reminiscences of these and later days were of honeyed sweetness to the Major, and moved him now to smiles, now to tears.

To-night they sat in front of the roaring fireplace and smoked, one his briar, the other his corncob pipe, but both filled out of the same pouch of excellent

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tobacco. Their speech came in fragments, with long intervals between, during which the wind moaned in the chimneys, sucked at the windows, and whistled shrilly at every crack. The ancient African, whose own father had been an untamable, cannibal king who chafed till the day of his death under the bonds of slavery, sat low in his chair, with his lack-lustre eyes fixed upon the fire, while he listened with a touch of superstitious, jungle awe to the wild tumult without.

"Marster," said he, suddenly lifting his head, "I heah bells."

"I guess not, Jube," answered Elias, emitting a reflective puff.

"Marster, I do. I heah 'em sweet and low, away off in the dis'ance. Listen!" He lifted a tremulous, shriveled brown hand. "Don' you heah them bells, marster?"

With the wind in its present quarter a fire alarm in the village might possibly reach the Hermitage. The Major rose and opened the door a few inches. But the hoarse howl of the storm was all he could hear.

"I don't hear any bells, Jubilee."

"Mebbe I was dreamin', mebbe I was dreamin'," admitted the old man, sinking back into his chair. "Mebbe it was the house-bell I heerd, callin' you and me to dinner, down in ole Prince Gawge—callin' you and me to dinner down in ole Prince Gawge—in ole—Prince—Gawge." His voice died away in an unintelligible mutter, which continued fitfully for several minutes, while he forebodingly shook his head.

"Marster," he began again, the phantoms still

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thronging his brain, "I been heahin' bells a long time now—mos' a year, I reckon. Sometimes they're a-jinglin' and a-janglin', like your mah'age-bells, and I see the pickaninnies flockin' to the house fur cake and wine. But mostly, marster, they're a-tollin', slow and sad, and I see the dead-wagon movin' by."

"In the course of nature, Jubilee," said Elias, thoughtfully, "it will not be long before you and I take that last slow ride. Were it to be to-morrow, I do not know that my sleep would be less sound to-night. Yet I am in no hurry. Let God take his time. I should like to hear the redbird sing again and the bob-white call. But if I don't, I shall take their song with me in memory. There is nothing in heaven, I fancy, that it would jar against. And when I go I want to be laid in the earth, not too deep, but just beneath the soil, where the blue-grass will dance above me in the warm winds, and the grasshopper fiddle by day and the cricket by night."

"We'se goin' soon, marster, I know. But 'tain't you and me I see in that dead-wagon, marster," said Jubilee, with some excitement. "It's a lily-of-the-valley. I can't rightly make out the face, because it comes and goes, comes and goes. Sometimes it's a-smilin', oh, so sweet; and sometimes it's a-weepin'. 'Pears like one time I know the face, then 'pears like again I don't. Leastwise, if I *do* know it, I ain't seen it for a long time; it's faintlike and unknowable to me now. I see as thoo a glass, darkly. Sometimes it's only a little girl; other times it's a woman, tall and slender as a saplin'."

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Elias fixed a pair of questioning eyes on the wandering black.

"What do you mean, Sherman?"

"Marster, marster, forgive me!" moaned the old man. "But it's Miss Chris! Las' night I heerd her laughin' in the hall, and seen her pullin' roses in the gyarden, and whistlin' the redbirds down outen the trees."

Elias covered his eyes with his hand. It was a short, thick, stubborn hand, whose weight more than one man had felt; but the tears now trickled from beneath it. Then the clock struck nine, and he heard Sherman shuffle to the door with a "Good-night, marster." Later he was conscious of the rustle of a woman's garments behind him; and Mrs. Hawley sank down on the arm of his chair, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. His sufferings in the months gone by had lacerated her heart and made her tenderer with him than ever before.

After a little he took his hand from his face and rested it on her knee. "What a terrible night!"

"I have been thinking of the poor," said she. "This wind must go through the Digbys' house like water through a sieve. You must stop in the morning and see if they have wood. I sent them a ham day before yesterday. The Masons, too. They have a new baby there."

"It seems to me they always have a new baby at the Masons," he observed.

"It does seem so," she answered, smiling.

"To-morrow will be a poor day for hauling wood, if this keeps up," said he. But she knew that the snow-drift which would keep him from supplying a fireless



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hearth with fuel had never yet been blown up in Pembroke County.

"Do you remember the snow of '71?" she asked, with a twinkle of fun.

She was thinking of a ram which had broken out of the barn on the night of the storm, and which Elias and Sherman had undertaken to catch. But there was another event in connection with that storm which quelled the fun in her eyes. The storm had begun on Sunday afternoon. On Monday morning the snow was still falling in blinding clouds. But Bird Hawley was expected on the eight-o'clock train, and the Major, loath to send a servant out into such weather, had fought his way to town through the drifts and the bitter gale. Bird did not come. He was at that moment a fugitive, and that night Christine was born.

"I am not likely ever to forget that storm," said he. "I thought then that Bird's act was the greatest cross which could be ever laid upon my shoulders. But the babe who was born that night has laid a heavier one upon them."

Mrs. Hawley dropped her cheek upon his head. It was the first time he had alluded to Christine, and the first time he had spoken Bird's name to her for many years. There fluttered in her bosom the hope that now the answer to her prayers was to come—that now the frozen springs of his nature were to melt.

"Husband, I wish that I might lift this cross from your shoulders! Can you not, if only for your own sake—for my sake—forgive her?"

"I have tried, Ruth—God knows I have tried," he

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answered with quivering lips. "But I can't—I can't—I *can't*. My heart is broken. I—let us not talk about it any more." She felt him tremble.

Christine's room was still intact. No one except Elias had crossed its threshold, and he only once. Had Mrs. Hawley disobeyed his orders and packed Christine's clothes decently away in a box, the tension on one of the overtaut heart-strings of the master of the Hermitage would have been relieved. For the little handkerchief on the dressing-table, and the little shoes in the middle of the floor, slowly succumbing to dust and mold, haunted Elias like unburied dead. Often in the sleepless watches of the night, his mind would wander for hours through that cold, still, dark room up-stairs. No grave, not even that of Christine's mother, locked within its insensate walls so many of his cherished memories, sweet imaginings, and glowing dreams—all dead, cold and dead, awaiting no resurrection morn.

The winter was hard for Elias to bear; but the spring was harder, when all nature was leaping to new life, while he, as he felt, was sinking into the grave; when the sap in shrub and tree was running up, and the sap in him was running down; when the thin moonlight filtered through tiny, pale-green leaves, and the newly arrived martins twittered about their boxes in the early morning.

Then came the apple bloom, that marvel of the year, when there descended upon the earth a cloud of waxen white, tinted with pink and freighted with surpassing sweetness, filling the bees with ecstasy, touching the least poetical with its promise of plenty, and giving

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new zest to life in every farmhouse and village. Major Hawley, on the first day, rode down the long enchanted rows, reining his horse now and then to examine an umbel more closely. He tried to work up a little enthusiasm over the splendid prospect for a crop, but the effort was a failure. For twenty years, ever since she was a little tot of three, perched on his saddle-horn, Christine had ridden with him on this procession to Pomona's shrine, and he now sadly missed her quick, contagious joy.

Crab-apple blossoms, however, were her favorite, and each spring she always gathered at least one armful of them for the dining-room table. She usually got them from a certain gnarled little tree which proclaimed its belief in the equality of apple-bearers by thrusting its shaggy head over the fence which guarded the Major's high-born Jonathans. To this tree Elias made a kind of devotional pilgrimage one day. He found an old gray horse and carriage by the roadside, and a bevy of girls gingerly robbing the prickly plebeian of its only glory. At sight of the proprietor the girls fell back in maidenly confusion over their innocent trespassing—all save one who boldly continued to tug at a tough branch which she had bent down. That one was Judith Flaster. The Major gallantly dismounted, and with his jack-knife—a much more effective instrument for this work than tender fingers—he had soon heaped everybody's arms full. Judith lingered behind the others, with a daring purpose upon her handsome face.

“I am going to take these to Chris, grandpa. What shall I tell her from you?”

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For a moment the old man's brain swam. "Tell her—tell her I cut them!" he faltered.

As he sat on the porch that night, smoking, he heard the first whippoorwill of the season, down in the thicket by the creek. "*Whippoorwill, whippoorwill, whippoorwill!*" The birds had sung in the selfsame spot ever since he came to Illinois. In the beginning, while his young wife's heart still yearned, as only an exile's can, for old tide-water Virginia, she used to listen to the weird birds with the tears slowly trickling down her cheeks. They reminded her of home. Since that time their song had always tinged the Major with melancholy. Yet each year, on the warm, damp nights of late April or early May, he began to listen for the notes of the first arrival, and in the fall he sighed when the last one was gone.

How many generations of whippoorwills had lived and died in the creek bottom in that cycle of fifty years, Elias had no idea; but he liked to think of the birds as being the same individuals from year to year. Yet how great the change with him in that period! Children had been born to him, and children to those children, and still again children to these. Some were dead and some in foreign lands. He had fought in a great internecine war; he had lived to see the abolition of slavery, and the development of his adopted state from an outpost of civilization into one of the foremost commonwealths of the Union. The stage-coach in which he came to this new country, had given way to the lightning express. Twice had he sat in Congress, and once the gubernatorial chair had been his for the asking. His home had grown from a six-room cottage to its present manorial propor-

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tions. Acre after acre of prairie and forest had been subdued under his direction and made to blossom as the rose.

Yet Elias felt to-night as if his life had been a failure. His sun was setting behind a cloud. The great clan of which he had been the proud head, and to which he had given as a mother gives to her child, seemed waning in its allegiance to him. Since Christine's marriage the Hermitage had rung with no festivities; and guests, even of Hawley blood, had been few and far between.

As he sat musing in the dark, Zepherine approached. She was his favorite among the servants, and he recognized her step at once.

"Major Hawley, kin I speak to you about some-thin' private?"

"Yes."

"Did Mis' tell you me and Billy is thinkin' about gittin' married?"

"Yes. You had better think about it a little longer."

Zepherine grinned, showing a row of faultless teeth.

"Major, do you suppose you could put up a little cabin fur us, if we did git married—just a little, teentsy cabin fur two?"

"I might. How much rent do you suppose Billy would be willing to pay?" he asked, with a humor too subtle for Zepherine to catch.

"About two dollars a month, I reckon."

"Very well. I'll start the cabin when I see your marriage-certificate. But if I were you, I shouldn't be in any hurry."

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She still lingered, with her hands behind her back. "Would you care, Major Hawley," she asked hesitatingly, "if we invited Miss Chris to the weddin'? She wouldn't come, of co'se—now; but we'd like to send her an invitation, just to let her know we ain't forgot her."

The Major did not answer at once. Zepherine shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. She was afraid of few people on earth, but Major Hawley was one of them.

"Yes," said he, "you may send her an invitation."

## CHAPTER XXII

ONE beautiful Sunday morning late in June, Major Hawley sat in his rustic hickory chair on the veranda. The lawn was flecked with quivering light and shade. A drenching rain the night before had washed the face of the earth clean; the sky was as bright as burnished silver, and the air crystal clear. The pebbles in the driveway shone as if scoured, and every leaf and blade of grass was a vivid green.

The yellowing wheat rippled under a breeze which was almost unseasonably cool, although it was hot enough in the sun. The quail calls came loud and clear from beyond the house orchard, and out of a thick growth of young elms, some distance away, arose the solemn chant of the wood-thrush. "*O love-ly! O ho-ly! King of Heav'n—and of Earth!*" he seemed to sing, slowly, with a pause between each phrase, as if the world were hushed to listen, and haste would be a sacrilege. The spires of the village shot up from a solid bank of green on the horizon, and the first bells for Sunday-school, mellowed by distance and blending with the notes of quail and thrush, floated tremulously across the prairie.

It was then that the Major rose and announced his intention of going to church—for the first time in

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months. Mrs. Hawley quietly closed her Bible and went to dress. Half an hour later she emerged from her room in her black silk, with fan and kerchief in one hand, and a leather-bound Psalm-book in the other. Elias, freshly shaven and garbed in immaculate linen, drove up with the phaeton a moment later.

The rain had beaten the road hard, so that there was neither dust nor mud. In town, the people were flocking to church, singly, in pairs, and in groups; the men in black—except some fashionable young bucks in flannels—and the women in cool translucent white. Little boys creaked stiffly along in unaccustomed shoes, with little sisters tripping demurely by their sides, in broad sashes, white stockings and shoes, and nodding picture-hats.

But not everybody was going to church. Old Gaston Brouters, in the clean white shirt which was his only tribute to the day, strolled through his garden, pipe in mouth, and paused to salute the passing phaeton. Bromley Smith, coatless and collarless, was starting for the country in his old buggy, with his wife by his side, to look at his farm. A barefooted boy hurried along with a glistening tin pail full of milk—possibly destined to be turned into ice-cream. A group of men and boys lounged on the court-house green, playing mumblety-peg. Another group, a shade better dressed and more respectable looking, were seated on the court-house steps, smoking and whittling, while one of their number read aloud from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

Most of the stores were closed, but in the cool interior of Bertram's drug-store, the habitués of the place



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had already gathered, to wait in a vague way for the post-office to open at noon. Zadok Hunt, too, the only self-confessed infidel in town, sat at the bench in his little shoe-shop, making a pretense of work—of which the poor fellow had little enough to do, owing to his religious views, six days in the week. Here and there an unshaven man in carpet slippers shuffled homeward with steak for a belated breakfast. Thus even in this little community two worlds were visible—the church-going and the non-church-going—looking at life from different points of view and having little in common.

The old church, erected in 1857, stood some distance from the street. Sparrows passed in and out of the slatted belfry; pigeons strutted and cooed on the cornice; a redheaded woodpecker clung to the tip of the spire and sounded his harsh call, interlarded with lusty tattoos. The front of the building was a mass of ivy, which completely hid the two false windows on this side. The limestone step at the door had been hollowed by the attrition of many a foot—of halting age and sprightly youth, the slow-moving pall-bearer, and the hasting bride and groom.

Along one side of the church was a hitching-rack, gnawed deep in the years ago by restless, fly-tormented horses while the droning notes of the minister floated out of the windows above, and the horses' masters, perchance, dozed in the cushioned pews. This rack was well filled when the Major and Mrs. Hawley drove up, and the church itself was two-thirds full. Save for the murmur which arises from every assembly, a solemn hush lay over the congregation, broken at intervals by a

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sepulchral cough, or the rattle of a parasol against a pew-back, and once by the thump of a hymn-book upon the floor in the vicinity of Willie Stephenson, who guiltily ducked his head as his mother leaned toward him with a silken rustle and the light play of beads against the seat.

Outside, a jay called loudly; a dove cooed. A bumblebee sailed in at an east window, with the sun glistening upon his courtly jacket of black and gold; he circled once about above the area of flowered hats, as if mistaking them for a garden, and then sailed out again. A baby babbled out with startling distinctness, but was instantly hushed by the flushed young mother. Wandering streams of perfume threaded the air; fans plied ceaselessly, agitating loose ends of hair on white necks, and gently lifting laces and ribbons.

If Major Hawley had come—as his wife believed—with the hope of seeing Christine, he was disappointed. His son Lyman's broad back loomed like a wall, a few pews ahead, alongside his two girls. Across the aisle sat Horace Flaster, beside his wife, with the air of a man who realizes that he is doing an eminently respectable thing. Just in front of the banker sat Charlie and Judith, the latter gowned in all the splendor which the sacred occasion would permit—and perhaps a little more. Her pearly shoulders gleamed through a netlike stuff; her beautiful neck shone with alabaster whiteness below her jetty coils of hair; and three or four long-stemmed roses were pinned to her breast. Then the Major's eyes wandered on to Judge Emory, in his white waistcoat—to Ed Leffingwell and family—to Diana, with Pauline lean-

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ing against her side and counting the lamps in the chandelier above. But no Christine!

At the last stroke of the second bell, Dr. Burrell passed up a side aisle to the pulpit, where he knelt a moment in silent prayer. His hair, as white and fine as carded fleece, swept his shoulders and framed a face of almost feminine spirituality. Indeed, sex seemed to have fallen, like a worn-out garment, from his gentle spirit, in some such manner as his body of clay would also soon fall. His manner was that of the visionary who lives in a land of books and dreams. Advancing to the pulpit, he rested one arm caressingly on the old Bible, and looked out over the audience with a serene, far-away light in his faded blue eyes.

"To-morrow afternoon, at two o'clock, in this house," he began, in a clear, musical voice, "will occur the funeral of Sister Rebecca Townsend. She was taken from us, as doubtless most of you know, at about four o'clock this morning. The body will be sent for burial to her old home, near Jackson, Tennessee. As many of you as possibly can, please make it convenient to be present at the funeral. Brother Townsend is very old and feeble—well-nigh helpless in this distressing crisis—and he needs your sympathy."

He paused briefly. "Sister Farmer is still very low; and Albert, young son of Brother Hart, who shot himself while out squirrel-hunting last week, has not improved as was hoped. Let us pray that there may be a change in his condition soon. His Sunday-school class, headed by their teacher, called on him in a body last week; and I have no doubt that this evidence of their

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love was a gratifying thing to the boy and his parents as well."

Miss Hewitt the teacher flushed slightly as several heads were turned in her direction. Dr. Burrell again paused.

"Death and sickness should not fail to give us food for reflection, for they are the common lot. Yet, after all, our greatest duty is to the living and the well. On next Tuesday the annual Sunday-school picnic will be given in Shaw's Grove. Conveyances will leave the church at nine o'clock. Do not be late. You who have vehicles of your own, kindly use them as far as may be convenient. This picnic is for old as well as for young; so everybody come. Major Hawley, we are a little short on vehicles. Would it be entirely convenient for you to let us have your wagonette?"

The Major rose courteously in his pew. "My stable is at your disposal, Dr. Burrell. I shall also be glad to send, in addition to any vehicles, a dozen fried chickens."

"Thank you, sir," said the pastor, joining in the smile which passed over the audience. "You couldn't make a more acceptable contribution. A picnic in Southern Illinois without fried chicken would be like an egg without salt, or a kiss without love. . . . Next Saturday evening at eight o'clock will be held our third Quarterly meeting. The official board please take notice and try to be present. Some questions of importance will come up for settlement. Brother Trotman, the presiding elder, will preach for us next Sunday morning, after which the Lord's Supper will be administered.

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. . . Remember the prayer-meeting on Thursday night. It's the midweek means of grace. It has been well attended, but the room will still accommodate a few more. . . . Let us sing Hymn No. 99—'This is my story, this is my song.'"

Lyman Hawley and family were to take dinner at the Hermitage. After the sermon and the prolonged social exchange which followed, the Major drove to Lyman's house. As soon as Bessie had been divested of her white shoes and stockings, and Lyman had hitched up, the party started for the country, Daisy riding with her grandparents. The Major led the way, along one of the side streets characteristic of Barnwell—really a grass-grown lane, overarched by trees, with shrubbery leaning familiarly over the picket fences. Yet some of Barnwell's best families lived on just such a street, in rambling old houses of half or three-quarters of a century before, yards full of lilacs and honeysuckles, beds of old-fashioned flowers along the walks, verandas smothered with greenery, and spacious gardens in the rear, the haunt of catbirds and wrens.

The Singletons, in fact, lived on just such a street. But it was a much less pretentious house than the Singletons' that the Major's eye presently fell upon with a start—or rather on the young woman in a hammock before such a house. He glanced instantly at Mrs. Hawley and her expression confirmed his discovery.

"Have they moved?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes."

"When?"

"About a month ago."

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"Why?"

"Haven't you heard that he lost everything in that coking company?"

"I didn't even know that he had gone into it."

The thought of his granddaughter living in that cheap little house hurt Elias, and at dinner he talked little. Christine had been humbled in the eyes of the community, and he, her grandfather, had not stretched forth his hand to help her. To a man with his views of family loyalty, the thought was painful.

"Lyman," said he, after dinner, as he passed the cigars, "did Norman Colfax mortgage his home to go into that coking deal?"

Lyman would have been astounded at this mention of Colfax's name had he ever permitted himself such a weakness; but his thick layer of fat allowed sensations to percolate through only as fast as they could be conveniently absorbed.

"I guess he did," he drawled, lighting his cigar and tossing the burnt match over the veranda railing.

"Just what I predicted!" murmured Elias. "Reckless, quixotic! I presume, then, his house is for sale."

"Yes, it is."

Outside the circle of shade about the house, the sun glanced dazzlingly from the wheat, and the old man blinked reflectively for some time before speaking again. Lyman waited cautiously.

"I have a duty in this matter, Lyman, unpleasant as it is. Do you suppose Colfax would accept any help from me in saving his home?"

"No, father, I don't."

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"Why not?" demanded Elias, with some asperity, but he did not seem surprised.

"You ought to know why," returned the son.

"I do not know," protested the old man vigorously. "Am I a stranger, offering them charity? They belong to my family and I have a right to help them. If I choose to forget the past, can they not do as much?"

Lyman was touched at the sight of his father's twitching fingers and uncontrollable emotion; but Elias was not yet a dotard, and his son spoke plainly.

"They offered to meet you half way once, father. They came to you and asked your forgiveness, and you refused it. You'll have to go to them now. It's your forgiveness, not your money, that they want; and they will never accept the latter in lieu of the former."

"I could forgive them, my boy," exclaimed the sire with misty eyes, "if I thought they wanted to be forgiven—if I thought they cared for it! But I feel as if they had passed out of my life—as if they had cast me off like an old coat, and that what I do or don't do matters little to them now. Perhaps I have been harsh in my judgment. Perhaps I was too harsh at the time. I may have made a mistake. I probably expected too much. I forgot how old I was, how young she was. But it is too late to go back now. To return to the old relation is impossible. Beyond the river it may be different. What the other side contains, no man knows; but I grow impatient to cross over and learn. I have the ferryman's price in my hand. I have cumbered the earth too long. The grave yearns for my clay."

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Verily the tide of vitality which had run through Elias Hawley's veins in such a marvelous flood for more than three-fourths of a century was at last beginning to ebb. Lyman labored to comfort his aged parent. But the hand through which the hopes of life have slipped too often, at last ceases, like a drowning man's with a rope, to close upon them; and on the way home Lyman said to his wife, sadly: "Father is growing old."

August came in the royal pomp of gold and purple—the Spanish-needle and the iron-weed decking fields and pastures as far as the eye could see. The tide of summer was at its flood. The fierce heat had hushed almost the last of the bird voices and dried up the creeks. But the broad-leafed corn, proud monarch of the land, only thrust its tasseled head the higher and rippled merrily under the sun's scorching darts. Between the rows the pumpkins glowed richly; apple-trees bent beneath their load of fruit; melons had swollen until their vines no longer hid them. All the coarser, hardier children of nature were in their prime.

But signs of the ebbing season were already at hand, even as in our moments of purest joy come uneasy thoughts of inevitable change. Some of the birds were already gathering in flocks and roaming restlessly about the country, with their eyes turned prophetically toward the south. The grasses by the roadside had lost their sap, and were bending wearily to the earth. Every weakling among the trees was touched with a hectic yellow. The succulent green things of spring and early summer had long since perished; and only stubble re-



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mained to mark the place of wheat and oats, timothy and clover.

Major Hawley rode across the country one morning to a cabin stuck in the edge of the woods, where the mother and two of her numerous brood were down with a fever. He carried a basket on his arm, packed by Mrs. Hawley. Back at the Hermitage, at about the same moment, Diana Singleton was urging her sorrel horse up the lane at unwonted speed. She leaped gracefully from the buggy to the porch and disappeared inside without tying her horse, although he was by no means a trusty animal. Three minutes later Mrs. Hawley was pinning on a broad-brimmed hat before her pier-glass.

"Zepherine, run and tell Cordelia to come here," said she, quickly but calmly. When Cordelia came panting in, Mrs. Hawley continued: "When Major Hawley returns, Cordelia, tell him that I have gone to the bedside of one very dear to us." Even in that moment of stress, she would not violate her husband's known wishes before the servants by mentioning Christine's name.

"Huh!" snorted Cordelia wrathfully, when she had regained the kitchen. "I'll tell him, plump and plain, she's done gone to *Miss Chris's* bedside—pore little dear!" Then she burst into tears.

She failed to carry out her threat, but Major Hawley knew well enough whom she meant. Without a word, for the curious eyes of the kitchen were on him, he passed on to the library. Its dim coolness was in soothing contrast to the heat and glare of the landscape, and he sank into a chair with a sigh of relief, leaned his head back,

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and closed his eyes. After a moment, though, he rose and made the usual daily entry in his journal—"Wind, S. W. Temp., 96. Tenth day without rain." The condition of the pastures and the falling leaves of a maple followed. He also chronicled his visit to the Griggses and their sickness. But after he had closed the book, the emotion which had been struggling upward all along reached the surface. Opening the book again he added: "Christine is sick. God preserve her!"

He passed two restless hours until noon, when he expected Mrs. Hawley back. But she did not come, and he ate a solitary dinner. Zepherine stood behind his chair, surreptitiously chewing gum, spasmodically fanning him, and occasionally sticking out her tongue at him—not out of any malice, for she liked him, but merely because the temptation to do something daring and naughty behind his back, was too great to be resisted.

He fretted about the place till five o'clock, wandering from one room to another, visiting the stable, strolling down to Sherman's cabin, and finally picking a basket of tomatoes. He was engaged in the last when he heard the sound of wheels on the gravel. With a feeling of thankfulness, he quickly finished his task and hastened to the house. Zepherine met him at the door. The vehicle had not brought Mrs. Hawley, but only a boy with a note from her. She did not know, she wrote, when she would be home, and she asked for certain articles of clothing. Not a word about Christine's condition, although he read the note through three times.

"Get those things for the boy," said he dully,

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turning the message over to Zepherine, who could read nicely.

"I done got 'em," she answered, coolly implying that she had already read the note.

This was on Tuesday. Wednesday and Thursday dragged fearfully. Then came Friday. It also chanced to be the thirteenth of the month, and Elias heard Cordelia sternly forbid Lucy to begin a shirt-waist on this doubly sinister day. No further word had come from Mrs. Hawley, and the Major had overheard no news among the servants.

But about ten o'clock, as Elias passed the kitchen door for perhaps the twentieth time that morning, he saw Cordelia swaying to and fro in a chair, with her apron over her head, and moaning in the negro manner he knew so well. He suddenly stopped, stricken cold with a horrible fear.

"What is the matter, Cordelia?" he asked, in an unnatural voice.

"O my Gawd, Major Elias, pore little Christine gwine to die!" whimpered the negress.

"Who told you so?" he demanded, almost harshly, but his face was ashen, and he placed his hands on the door-frame to still their trembling.

"Billy done tole me juss now. Pore little sugar-pie!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

WITHOUT any destination, but feeling that he must escape from the place or go mad, Elias ordered his horse and buggy. He drove to the post-office first. It happened to be mail-time, and a crowd waited for the windows to open. An ominous quiet seemed to fall over the gathering as Major Hawley entered. The salutations of even his friends seemed constrained. Furtive glances were shot at him, and murmured comments reached his ears from behind.

He stood his ground, however, without flinching. Judith Flaster entered a moment later, with a grave face and less than her usual deliberation. Elias's heart quickened. Of all people, Judith would be most likely to dare that miserable prohibition of his, and tell him about Christine. But she did not. She spoke to him almost coldly, glanced in her box, and passed out at once.

Hurt as well as disappointed, Elias crossed over to a bench in the court-house square. After the gathering at the post-office had dispersed, the only visible life was the sparrows. The numerous recesses about the court-house offered irresistible attractions to these enterprising birds, and they had founded a feathered city of metropolitan proportions. The crowded tenement life, however, imposed a familiarity very trying to sparrow tem-

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per, and there was no hour of the long summer days when bickerings, protests, indignation meetings, house-breakings and knock-down fights did not disturb the academic quiet of Pembroke County's temple of justice. To-day, shortly after the Major sat down, two cocks, locked in a desperate grapple of beak and claw, sank fluttering to the ground, and tore at each other with the ferocity of tigers.

"Such passion in two atoms the size of my thumb!" reflected Elias, moodily. "But puny as their rage is in the eyes of man, how much punier must be man's in the eyes of God! Our rages, our hatreds—what are they? Only love and kindness are of avail."

He arose, restlessly, and strolled into the sheriff's office. Keeler was deep in a game of solitaire, with three or four languid spectators. There was nothing here to detain a man in the Major's frame of mind, and after two or three turns up and down the corridor, he did what he knew from the beginning he would eventually do—he started for Dr. Hammond's office.

This building stood between two stores, and abutted on the sidewalk, just like a store, but was elevated a step or two. The door was never locked in the daytime; a jar of smoking tobacco was free to whomsoever had a pipe; and the tables were littered with magazines and books. "Doc" Hammond's out-of-door largeness and wholeness of soul were further suggested by a case of guns and fishing-rods, some rifle-scores tacked on the wall, and a stuffed mountain-lion. Yet Major Hawley did not like him—in part, doubtless, because Hammond was a Republican and decidedly free with his political

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opinions—and this was the second or third time he had ever been in the office.

Hammond was not in, and Elias sat down and fanned himself with his hat. He was not yet certain of the motive which had brought him here, or just what he would say to the doctor. Before he had come to any conclusion, Hammond briskly entered, followed by his Irish setter Sancho. He saluted the Major as familiarly as if the latter were an habitu   of the place, stripped off his coat, and opened a thick volume which lay on his desk—all with the air of a busy man.

“Anything I can do for you, sir?” he asked, after a moment, without lifting his eyes. He knew, of course, that Dr. Berry was the old man’s physician.

Elias stiffened slightly under the young man’s easy manner; yet when he answered his tone was one of unusual mildness.

“Is Mrs. Colfax under your care?” he asked.

“She is.”

“I stopped to inquire about her condition.”

Just what those simple words cost his pride, no one but himself could know. But Oscar Hammond could have made a fairly accurate estimate.

“She is in a very critical condition,” he answered gravely. “She has about one chance in ten to live.”

Elias grew deadly pale, and the heavy folds of flesh on his cheeks quivered. But before he could speak, a barefooted boy bounded into the room and thrust a note into the doctor’s hand. With a wrinkle between his black brows, Hammond glanced the note through, and then fell into a brown study. Elias nervously shifted

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his hat from one knee to the other. A peculiar suspension of his faculties had taken place at sight of the boy; and his only distinct impression now was of Dr. Hammond's statuesque attitude and black curls.

"Tell Mr. Colfax that I'll be right up again," said the doctor to the boy.

He turned to his book again, and to the old man with the bleeding heart it seemed as if he were going to read through all eternity. Elias clinched his great hands until the nails bit the flesh and his knuckles grew white. Once or twice his lips parted, stiffly, but no sound issued forth. Then he tried again.

"Hurry, doctor, hurry!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

Hammond slowly closed his book, and sat with his hand over his eyes for a moment. Then he swiftly rose.

"Major Hawley, I want you to go with me."

Elias started, his face lit, and he blinked in a dazed way. Then the light slowly faded, as when a brief rift in a cloud-bank closes, and the gloom of the weary months settled over him again.

"I can't do it, sir," he answered, with a touch of his old pride.

"Why can't you do it?" asked Hammond brusquely. "Do you still harden your heart against that sweet girl while she battles with death?"

The old man suddenly clapped his hands to his face and shook with emotion. "You do not understand—you do not know what I have suffered!" he exclaimed piteously. "They do not want me—I can not force myself upon them."

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A great pity filled Hammond's heart, and he spoke in a softer tone, but with no uncertain emphasis.

"I happen to know that they *do* want you—that she, above all, wants you. She has not said so. She is proud, as wickedly proud as you yourself, Major Hawley. Believing herself in the right, I fancy she would die, just as you would, before she would humble herself to relieve her breaking heart. But in her delirium she has talked of you constantly, in a way to move a heart of stone. Can you do less, as a grandfather and a Christian, than to go to her now? Will you let her die, as she probably will, unforgiven? Or if she lives, will you let yourself die, in a few years at the most, with your heart still set in this unnatural hardness? If you do, how shall you greet each other in heaven? Your views of heaven and mine may be different, but it is my belief that the man who wickedly hardens his heart here will have no easy time in softening it there."

The handsome young fellow paused, with flashing eyes and face illuminated with the lofty sentiments to which he had just given voice. The old man sat with bowed head.

"Precious time is flying," the doctor added, after a moment.

"I will go," answered Elias.

With a smile which must have gladdened the hearts of the watching angels above, Hammond stooped and picked up Elias's hat, put it in the old man's uncertain hands, and led him to the buggy standing at the curb.

A strange confusion had come over Elias. He rode along with no clear idea of what streets they took or



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whom they passed. Some one stopped the doctor and made an inquiry; but the Major did not notice who it was, and it did not occur to him until they had ridden half a block further that the inquiry had related to Christine.

“She’s such a little girl that the measles won’t go hard with her,” he heard himself saying aloud. He knew that something was wrong with the words, and he glanced at the doctor for help. But the latter, who seemed a puzzling distance away, only nodded his head.

They passed a church—what church Elias could not have said. To him it seemed vast and magnificent, with a spire which pierced the very heavens, and a weather-vane which white-winged angels fluttered about. Or were they only pigeons?

He had no clear recollection of how he got into a darkened front room, although he recalled stepping down from the buggy and brushing past shrubbery, with some one firmly gripping his arm. He was alone. Outside, the drama of midsummer was in full swing, hot and glaring; inside, it was cool and dim. A breeze softly pulsated through the shuttered window, gently pushing the lace curtains aside, and laying its damp fingers upon the Major’s heated brow. A bumblebee droned in the flowering beans. Now and then, through the slats, came the breath of honeysuckle. The twitter of sparrows, the croaking of a tree-toad, and the strident notes of a grasshopper in the sunburnt grass, fell upon his ear soothingly, dreamily, and he nodded in his chair. It was all just as it used to be when he was a boy and

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lay on his back in the shade, watching the barn-swallows overhead and the drifting clouds beyond, and dreaming of mysterious, distant lands across the sea, where he would go when he became a man.

In this state, on the borderland of unreality, his mind wandered back to a breathless summer afternoon, long, long ago—nearly seventy years—when he, a lad of ten, stood beside his mother's open grave, amid the stately evergreens of the family burying-ground, with the neighbors grouped about in ceremonial black, bared heads bowed, and the sound of weeping on the air. A hush lay over the whole world then, it seemed to him, upon which the solemn, sonorous invocation of the minister broke most impressively. Then, after the last word, silence again fell; every weeping negro was still; not a pine-needle moved in the dead air. From a neighboring tree came the cooing of a dove. "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes!" Elias had never forgotten that moment, when his father's hand tightened spasmodically on his own, followed by the thump of earth upon the casket.

In the midst of this reverie, the old man started and lifted his head like a frightened deer. A faint, tremulous wail had slipped into his consciousness. He passed a trembling hand across his brow, as if to wipe the cobwebs from his brain. The sound came a second time. Was it fact or fancy? Was he in reality a boy again, and came that piteous wavering cry from the motherless lamb which his father had brought in from the pasture? Dazed and half fearful for his sanity, he mopped from his face the dew which oozed from every pore, and looked

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down at his wrinkled hands. Surely they were not a boy's.

Then the little wail trembled on the air for a third time. This time it cleared the mists from Elias's mind. The spell under which he had been laboring since that moment of agony in the doctor's office, passed away, and he became himself again. He knew now that it was no bleating of a lamb which he heard, but the cry of a babe, and that the babe was Christine's.

Having refused to think of her as a wife, it was not strange that the thought of her becoming a mother had never crossed his mind. But he accepted the fact now with wet eyes. He glanced about the room. He had never been in it before; not one piece of furniture, not one picture on the wall, had he ever seen before. Yet this was her *home*—she who was once to him as the breath of his nostrils—and she loved it. Then his mind turned to that other room in the Hermitage which she had also loved; and he drew a breath of blessed relief at the thought that it would now haunt him no longer. But in the same moment his heart sank again. His proffer of forgiveness might, after all, be too late. Already she might be beyond the——

Dr. Hammond appeared at the door and held up a beckoning hand. Elias rose, followed him down a hall, and found himself in another darkened room. There were several people in the room—a nurse, Mrs. Hawley, Diana, and Norman Colfax; but Elias saw nothing except a wraithlike face, whiter even than the pillow upon which it lay. Its beauty and transparency seemed scarcely of earth. The eyes were closed, and the lips

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were slightly parted in a smile—a smile of seraphic sweetness, as if her spirit had already caught the distant glint of white wings, and already heard, across the deep betwixt earth and heaven, the first faint swell of angel music.

“Is she dying?” whispered the old man hoarsely, seizing the doctor’s arm in a grip of iron.

“No, no!” answered Hammond cheerfully. “She is past the crisis and is going to live.”

Elias crossed the room and knelt beside the bed. With fixed eyes and motionless body, he watched the marble face. Mrs. Hawley pressed her handkerchief to her face at the sight; Diana, blinking rapidly, left the room; Colfax, haggard from anxiety and loss of sleep, respectfully turned his head.

Christine’s face at that moment seemed too delicate and ethereal a thing to Elias Hawley to be pressed by human lips, and he did not kiss her. But his eyes, like famished travelers of the desert at a well, drank in her beloved outlines over and over again. At last her lashes lifted, slowly, wearily, and the old man’s heart began to thump painfully. But she did not start at sight of him, as he had feared she might. Ah, no! Her tired eyes merely brightened a little, as if they had expected to find him there, and were glad not to be disappointed. Too weak to turn her head or to lift a hand, she looked into his face until neither of them could see any longer for their tears. Then her lips moved. He bent his head lower to hear.

“*Kiss me!*” came the words, as soft and low as the breath of summer over a field of clover.

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He reverently laid his lips upon her cheek.

"On my mouth!" she murmured, and he obeyed. Then a pause.

"I didn't come back in the morning to make the birds sing," she said, faintly but clearly. "But I'm going back now, just as soon as I'm well again."

"Come, my darling, come!" sobbed Elias, burying his streaming face in the coverlid.

Then the doctor approached with a smile. "No more talk now," said he, gently.

Elias rose, and for the first time became aware of the presence of his wife and Norman Colfax. But there was no hesitation, no awkwardness or embarrassment. He crossed the room and held out his hand with manly frankness.

"My son, some things are better left unsaid—can not, indeed, be said. If you will accept my presence here in lieu of words, I shall be glad. With God's help and your forgiveness, I shall take up my life to-day where I laid it down a year ago. Show me my great-grand-child."

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE new relation between Norman Colfax and Elias Hawley was naturally not a garment which either of them could put on forthwith and wear with absolute ease. Like all new garments, it required use to perfect the fit. But one of the most skilful tailors in the universe—the woman they both loved—was on hand to make such slight alterations as were needed. And in this work she was ably assisted by little Elias Norman Colfax.

Major Hawley was easy to love or easy to hate, according to the side he presented to one. His lovable side was now presented to Colfax with a constancy which the young man found all-compelling. For the next three weeks, Elias was at the young couple's home daily, and always at an hour when Colfax might be expected to be there, too. As usual, he seldom came empty-handed. The peaches, grapes, melons, eggs, and young chickens which he brought would have supported a boarding-house. Judith observed to her husband: "Grandfather has been bottled up for a year, and now that the cork is out he'll submerge everybody with his good-will."

It was not long before the old man climbed Colfax's stairs one day, for the first time in his life. Without any preliminaries, he transferred all of his legal business to

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Colfax, quite as a matter of course. In fact, it was done so naturally and sincerely, and with such singleness of purpose, that Colfax could do nothing but accept. To have refused it on the most laudable of grounds, or even to have hesitated, would have wounded a generous heart. So Colfax filed the papers away with a peculiar tenderness in his breast for the rugged, broad-shouldered old man who made his rocking-chair creak with every move.

"Now, Norman, what are you going to do about your house?" asked Elias, in a business-like tone.

"I am looking for a buyer." Then, to forestall any offer of financial help, which he felt that he could not then, on top of all the other favors, accept from Major Hawley, he added at once: "Horace Flaster offered to carry the mortgage indefinitely for me; but I feel that the burden, at present, would be irksome, and so I prefer to sell."

"I think you are right," answered Elias, to Colfax's relief. "What figure do you set on the property?"

"I paid three thousand and I should be willing to sell for that."

"Very well. I'll take it at that figure," said the Major.

"I can't let you do that, Major Hawley," declared Colfax, firmly.

"Why not?" asked Elias. "It's merely a matter of business with me. I want just such a house as that, and I consider it a bargain at that price. In fact, to relieve any embarrassment that you may feel, I may

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state that for my purpose it will suit me better than any other house in town."

"Under those circumstances, of course, I should be willing to sell to you," answered Colfax, but still eying the old man as if suspecting him of some generous motive.

"There's no sentiment about it," said Elias. "Do you accept my offer?"

"Yes."

"All right. Your word is as good as a deed. Now I'll tell you the particular use I have for that property," and his eyes began to twinkle. "You may remember that when you and Christine were married, I failed to observe the ancient and respectable custom of presenting the bride with some token of my affection and esteem. If it is not too late, I intend to offer her that property as a wedding-gift. Now don't you agree with me that it suits my purpose perfectly?"

Colfax's eyes grew misty. There was no way out of the kindly trap the old man had laid for him.

"Major Hawley, your kindness is overwhelming."

"Not at all, my son," returned Elias, with a smile such as had not lighted his face for a twelvemonth. "A gift of that price, from a man in my circumstances, to a favorite grandchild, is not unusual. I want to do all I can to make me forget the horrible nightmare which the last year has been to me. I want to blot it from my memory forever, and the sooner the better. If I could do it to-day by the sacrifice of that right arm"—extending the powerful member its full length—"I would submit to the knife, yea, to an *ax*, with the sweetest



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alacrity of my life. But oblivion is not to be so cheaply bought," he added sadly.

He was silent for a moment. "That is my plan—your house for a wedding-gift. But I have another plan, not so free from selfishness, and which I therefore hesitate to broach."

"You need not, after all you have done," said Colfax feelingly.

"Nevertheless, I do; and I offer it only with the understanding that you are perfectly free to reject it. It is simply this: I want you and Christine to come and live with Grandmother Hawley and me. We are lonesome and the presence of your little family at the Hermitage would be to us like manna to the children of Israel. Billy can drive you in and out; you will have telephonic communication with the village, and it will be an ideal place for the little lad when he begins to run around. I know the first objection which will come to your mind. You want a home of which you are master, where you can build and dig and plant to suit yourself. I know it is a maxim that no roof is big enough for two families. But if ever that roof existed, it is the one at the Hermitage. You can have your own rooms—a dozen of them—where you can always be by yourselves. It will be enough for us to know that you are near. As to the digging and planting, the Hermitage will some day be yours and Christine's. Wife and I can hold it but a few years more, and I should like your voice in the matter of such improvements as may be necessary before we give it up. Those improvements will be for you and Chris rather than for us. Now

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don't answer me yet. Talk it over with Chris. And if you decide that you can't come permanently, come for a year, for six months, for three months. But come to stay for good if you can."

The sonorous diapason of his natural voice, with which he had cowed many a rebellious political convention, was now stopped down, like an organ, to a pleading minor note, almost feminine. It revealed to Colfax as nothing else had yet the suffering which his marriage had inflicted on this old man; and it filled him with a wholesome desire to undo his part of the past as much as might lie in his power. He promised to talk the plan over with Christine that evening, and his tone filled Elias with hope.

There was circumspection in the reconciliation between the two men, which was only wise; but there was not a trace of it in the reconciliation between Christine and her grandfather. He simply opened his arms and she flew into them. Throughout her brief married life, she had been happy in her husband's love and in anticipations of her babe. But she was happier now. No ugly specter lurked in the background, to stalk to the front when her spirits were low; and all her plans and hopes of the future took on a new meaning now that the familiar and beloved figure of her grandfather was to be seen once more among the other relatives and her friends.

"Grampsy, Norman told me last night of your invitation to come to the Hermitage," said Christine, the next day.

Elias had brought in a brace of pullets, all ready

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for the frying-pan, and he and Chris were sitting at the moment in the back yard, under an ancient apple-tree. The baby, bolstered and swathed beyond possibility of cold or discomfort, lay in the hammock. Christine's eyes were seldom off him for more than thirty seconds at a time, although, as he could yet only wiggle his fingers and kick in a jerky fashion, there seemed no great danger of his climbing out of his nest.

"I just cried," she continued. "That was answer enough as to what *I* thought about accepting it. But I told him that this was a case where his feelings must be consulted before mine. Then he spoke so sweetly, grandfather, of your goodness and generosity since baby brought us all together once more—because baby *did* do it, you know—and said that he couldn't do less than meet you half way. He said he hadn't done anything yet to show *his* change of heart, and that he would like to have the chance. So we are coming!"

She crossed over to him—just as she used to do—slipped her arms around his neck, and pressed a happy kiss upon his temple. He drew her to his bosom in the old accustomed way, and for a moment silently patted her cheek.

"You grow more like your mother every day," said he fondly. "Once she sat thus on my lap, and *her* little baby lay in a hammock near by. It wasn't long ago. I could close my eyes and imagine it yesterday. But in sober reality I know that it was almost a quarter of a century ago. I am getting old, Chris. But I am not as old as I was six months ago." He smiled down into her eyes. "Ah, no, not by ten years. And it is all

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because we are waiting for you at the Hermitage. Even the phoebe which rears her two little families on the rafter of the veranda each summer is waiting to say good-by to you, I know, before she leaves for the southland."

"I have been waiting, too, a long time," said she softly.

"Wearily?"

"Yes, wearily."

"And you are only a babe—a babe with a babe! Too bad that you should have been weary so soon! Weariness should be only for age. Can you forgive me?"

"Grandfather!" said she reproachfully, and kissed him again.

Estelle approached with the basket in which the chickens had been brought.

"Estelle," said Elias cheerily, "what do you think of the new plan?"

"I ain't heerd of no new plan," answered the mulatto cautiously.

"Mr. Colfax and Miss Chris and the baby and you are all coming to the Hermitage to live."

Estelle's eyes lit with pleasure, but she looked incredulous until Christine confirmed the Major's words.

"It certain sure suits me all right," answered Estelle with a giggle. "I don't know, though, whether I'm goin' to be able to stand that love-makin' and sheeps'-eyin' 'tween Zeph and Billy or not. I heah they's about the worst on record. I ain't much on sich things myself." She giggled again. "If Zeph done tole me once she tole me a thousam times she never

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marry no man darker than Chollie Thawn, and that Billy Million's blacker than a quah of ink."

"On the outside, Estelle," observed the Major. "Inside, I think he's a good deal whiter than Charlie Thorn. But you may not be bothered as much as you imagine," he added, with a twinkle. "I understood this morning that Zepherine and Billy were temporarily not on speaking terms."

"Good Gawd!" tittered Estelle, at this irresistibly funny piece of news. "'Tween two stools that girl Zeph is gwine to sit on the flo' yit. If she do, she'll hit it hard. Them people that's so sure of their seat always do."

On a lovely September morning, with the drops of an early shower still flashing from sassafras and oak along the roadside, Christine was carried back to the Hermitage by her grandfather. Estelle and the baby, under Billy's tutelage, had preceded them by a few minutes. There was a point on the road, at a clump of wild cherry-trees, where one caught his first glimpse of the Hermitage, with its gray roof showing duskily through the treetops. As the buggy came opposite these cherry-trees, Christine clapped her hands over her eyes.

"Tell me when I can see the house, grandpa!" she exclaimed.

The old man smiled sympathetically at her emotion. He understood it well.

"Look now, my child," said he.

With kindling eyes and palpitating bosom, Chris gazed at the familiar prospect—the place of her birth, the scene of her enchanted childhood—and thirstily

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drank in every detail, from the outlying strawstacks on one side to the monuments in the family graveyard on the other.

"Grandfather, I am going back to Eden!" she murmured solemnly.

"Yes, back to Eden!" repeated Elias, fervently.

Three pickaninnies swung open the big gate for them. They passed between the square brick pillars into the lane, almost every fence-post of which had an individuality for Christine, by reason of bluebird's nest, or bob-white's favorite perch, or wild rose. Chris asked her grandfather to let old Katy walk. When they reached a little crab-apple tree, she exclaimed: "Stop, grampsy! I want to see if the brown thrush built here this year again."

She sprang down and quickly found the nest, though the fledglings had long since flown. Then she climbed back into the buggy with a glowing face. A little further on they came to a stunted honey-locust, which every June was garlanded with wild roses to its topmost bough, and later with the flaming trumpet-flower. Christine threw it a kiss, frolicsomenely, as if it were an old friend—as indeed it was—and laughed with suspicious joy while she hugged her grandfather's arm.

He rather expected what followed, considering her tension. As they approached the end of the lane, she caught sight of her grandmother on the veranda, with the baby in her arms; old Sherman on the ground, hat in hand, straining his purblind eyes in their direction; Cordelia waiting in her favorite attitude, with her hands on her mighty hips; and the rest of the little band of

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black retainers scattered about. Then the girl's overcharged feelings gave way, and dropping her head upon Elias's shoulder she began to sob. He halted the horse, momentarily, behind a clump of alders. The three pickaninnies who had been stealing a ride on the axle-tree, lined up on one side of the lane in round-eyed wonder. Even old Katy looked around inquiringly, as if not understanding why the final act of this joyous home-coming should be delayed.

But Chris was quickly herself again, and they drove on. Her grandmother was the first to greet her, with shining eyes. But Mrs. Hawley's demonstrations were tame compared with those of Cordelia, who, since she had grown so fat, seldom went to town, and had not laid eyes on Chris since the latter's marriage. She threw her arms repeatedly about the fair prodigal, crushed her to her vast breast over and over again, kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, and exclaimed repeatedly: "Gawd bress you, sugar-pie! Gawd bress you, sugar-pie!"

Old Sherman shuffled forward and held out his hand. But when Christine impulsively held out both of hers, he instantly dropped his hat to the ground and held out both of his.

"Missie Chris," he began, in his rumbling bass, "you brung more joy to your grandpaw's heart and to mine to-day than you ever know. I ain't got nuttin' more to live for now. I'm sassified. The Lawd's will is done. I'm willin' to lay down to-night and leggo of my soul jess like that lil gal there leggo of her toy balloom last Fo'th of July, and let it fly away to

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heaven. I don' care to tarry any mo' on this side of Jordan. The angels standin' on the furdur bank are a-beckonin' me to come, and I soon have to go."

"Don't hurry the Lord, Jubilee," interposed Elias. "He'll call you in His own time. This would be a poor season to leave us, with the girl just come home. You want to stay and get acquainted with her again, don't you? Why, to-morrow morning, when the news gets around among the little feathered folk, there'll be such a chorus up in the trees, September though it is, as you and I haven't heard since we left the banks of the Blackwater."

"Yassa, marster, I knows it. I ain't a-goin' *right* now. I'm gwine to tarry a spell."

"Billy," said Christine, laughing at recollection of Zepherine's costume on the night of the Honey Creek dance, "have you and Zepherine been to any balls lately?"

"Yessum, oncet or twicet," grinned Billy, hitching up a pair of trousers whose roominess in waist and seat suggested descent from Major Hawley.

"I guess he ain't forgot, either, how I looked the night you and Miss Judy dressed me up," said Zepherine, proudly. "If he has, I know some men that ain't."

"I ain't forgot," said Billy, humbly.

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THE END.



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